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Sustainability and the Sacred: A Comparative Study of Indian Religious Environmentalism with Special Reference to Christian and Indigenous Communities in the State of Kerala

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Declaration

I hereby declare

(a) that this dissertation has been composed by me,

(b) that the work is my own, and,

(c) that it has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

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Name: Paul Singh Job Retnaselvam

Date: 30/09/2019

Abstract

This thesis is a study of Indian religious environmentalism with particular reference to Christian and indigenous religions in the state of Kerala, South India. Ethnographic investigations of church communities were carried out in twenty-five locations in four Dioceses of the Church of South India in Kerala. At one location a study was also conducted of an indigenous community of the Kani tribes in the Puravimala Tribal colony in Thiruvananthapuram. In Indian religious environmental discourse Christianity has been blamed as the root cause of the ecological crisis but studies of Indian environmentalism have not been able to substantiate such claims with the support of field-based studies. The Keralan Christian ecological consciousness, which is rooted in pre-Christian tradition, views nature to be sacred, and the sacredness dwells in the quality life of all living and non-living beings in the planet earth.

The aim of this thesis is to determine whether Indian religions can play a significant role in the quest for a sustainable society in India, and also to establish to what extent can Indian conceptions of the sacred inform and promote ecological sustainability in India. A second aim of the thesis is to determine the ecological behaviour embedded in the rituals and practices of the Christian and indigenous communities and gather relevant resources to formulate a theology of environmental sustainability.

The principal research finding of this thesis is that the concept that nature is sacred is defined within a frame of ecclesial movement by expressing nature as a worshipping community. When nature becomes a worshipping community, it is revealed that ordinary places become sacred places and the Christian rituals and sacraments offer an ecclesiological environmental activism. The second finding is that the sacredness of nature is rooted in indigenous and Christian traditions providing an ecological consciousness through the traditional practice of nature conservation and resource management as a sign of environmental sustainability. The

indigenous holistic approach to environmental sustainability is the theological foundation of Indian Christian environmental theology and draws resources from environmentalism “from below.” Thirdly, Indian religious environmentalism emerges from the voices of the victims of the environmental crisis by upholding environmental justice and articulating their sufferings “from below.” It engages in local environments as a counter movement to environmentalism “from above.” The concepts of sacred and sustainability provide a theological grounding for environmental sustainability by speaking about quality environment. The doctrines of creation are redefined from the animistic and ecclesial traditions of Indian Christians which are well reflected with their understanding of sacred metaphors, to portray the wounded nature as the “othered body” and the “Christic-cosmic body,” as the cosmic body offers freedom to sustain quality environment. In religious environmentalism the sacred approach to nature defines quality environment as a sacred manifestation of environmental sustainability.

The first chapter discusses the contemporary crisis of Indian religious environmentalism, which mainly focuses on the Hindu and Christian approach to the environment and it examines whether the environmentalism of the poor is properly addressed. The second chapter gives an overview about religious environmentalism in the light of ethical questions, which investigates the cosmological consciousness of communities and the discourses of the environmentalism from below. The emergence of the concept of sustainability and the sacred is a main concern of the third chapter, which explains my ethnographic study that was conducted in the ecological landscape of the four CSI dioceses in Kerala and the Kani Tribal colony in Puravimala. The fourth chapter describes the concept of the sacred from the environmental consciousness embedded in the worshipping communities and how these communities maintain environmental activism effectively. The fifth chapter discusses the ecological tradition ‘from below’ in the light of the ethnographic study of the Kani Tribal colony in Puravimala and examines how the ecological behaviour of the CSI Christians in Kerala is related to the ecological spirituality and practices of the Kani Tribal

community. The sixth chapter explains how to understand and respond to environmental problems based on the concerns of Christian environmentalism ‘from below.’ The final chapter attempts to formulate a theology of environmental sustainability, based on the ecological doctrines drawn from the ethnographic locations. This points out that suffering from below and quality environment as theological categories toward environmental sustainability, and the sacred approach to nature defines quality environment as a manifestation of environmental sustainability.

Lay Summary

This thesis is a study of Indian religious environmentalism with special refence to Christian and indigenous religions in the State of Kerala, South India. It is an ethnographic research carried out in twenty five locations in the four dioceses of the Church South India, and an indigenous community which lives in Puravimala Tribal colony, close to one of the congregations of South Kerala Diocese in Thiruvananthapuram. There are numerous discussions about Indian religious environmentalism, but most of them highlight the secular aspect of it. The discussions about Indian religious environmentalism highlight that Indian religious environmentalism does not represent a viable and strong source of pro-environmental behaviours and values. But this study has analysed the concepts of sacred and sustainability, which remain marginalised in current environmental discussions in India. This research examines whether Indian religions are a significant source for a sustainable society in India, based on Indian conceptions of the sacred. It also aimed at determining the relationship between contemporary religious environmentalism and indigenous Indian traditions which pre-date the long introduced religion of Christianity in Kerala. Hence, this study has included a comparative ethnographic engagement with the Kani tribal community in Puravimala tribal Colony alongside the Protestant Christian communities as well as study of indigenous influences among Christians. There are two principal findings that emerge from this study. The first principal finding is that the ecological consciousness of the Christian communities in Kerala is deeply rooted in indigenous traditions, which upholds the widely held Indian view that nature is sacred, and the sacredness is related to all living and non-living beings on the earth. The second finding is that Indian religious environmentalism, that I have examined, has a distinctive perspective 'from below' which emerges from the environmental locations of Dalit and Tribal communities. The perspective 'from below' also represents the voices of the victims of environmental crisis in rural areas which contrasts with the environmental movement in Indian cities. The Christian approach to Indian religious environmentalism places the experiences of the victims of

environmental crisis with a special focus on environmental justice, and present freedom to the environmental victims as a theological category toward environmental sustainability. A sacred approach to environment aims at creation of quality environment. Therefore, in religious environmentalism the sacred approach to nature defines quality environment as a sacred manifestation of environmental sustainability.

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I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Prof. Michael S. Northcott and Dr. Arkotong Longkumer, my supervisors, for their guidance and support during the time of study, research and writing of this thesis. As principal supervisor (until 31st December 2017), Prof. Michael S. Northcott, acted as a 'critical friend' providing valuable guidance, scholarly input and consistent encouragement. I had originally planned to do library based research to articulate the concepts of scared and sustainability, but after my initial discussions with him, I was motivated to incorporate field research as well. His face to face supervisory guidance and group supervisory meetings provided academic support and inspired me to approach my research subject clearly and with proper academic vigour. He has been also kind enough to read my writings several times and make appropriate corrections for which I remain extremely thankful.

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The Department of Christian Ethics of Practical Theology in New College in general and Theology Seminars in particular, have influenced my research greatly by exposing me to contemporary trends in critiquing religious environmentalism. In connection with this academic engagement I extend my thanks to Prof. Jolyon Mitchell and Dr. Joseph Grummet. I am also thankful to Dr. Stanley Brian for extending support and encouragement to me in their various capacities. In New College I remain thankful to Mrs. McLean Karoline for her valuable help and encouragements.

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Dedication

I
dedicate this thesis
to my wife Abida Paul and my sons Job Kegan Paul and Kevin Paul Job
for their sacrificial support and my parents J. Job & Retnaselvam,
sister Singh Jane and brother Livingstone Singh
for their love.

Table of Contents

Part 2

Abbreviations

1.	AICRPE Ethnobiology	All India Coordinated Research Project of
2.	BJP	Bharatiya Janta Party
3.	CEYF	Christian Endeavor Youth Fellowship
4.	CSI	Church of South India
5.	EICLC	English Indian Clays Limited Company
6.	EKD	East Kerala Diocese
7.	ESA	Ecologically Sensitive Area
8.	HLWH	High Level Working Group
9.	KCR	Kasturirangan Commission Report
10.	KKD	Kollam Kottarakara Diocese
11.	LMS	London Missionary Society
12.	MoEF	Ministry of Environment and Forests
13.	RSS	Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh
14.	SKD	South Kerala Diocese
15.	VHP	Vishva Hindu Parishad
16.	WF	Women’s Fellowship
17.	WGEEP	Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel

Introduction

(i). Context and Research Problem

A major ecological challenge posed by Lynn White Jr that "Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt,"[1] is the starting point of my research. White finds the root cause of the ecological crisis in an anthropocentric religious approach to nature, and argues that, "by destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects."[2] Similarly, in Indian religious environmental discourse Vandana Shiva and Pankaj Jain have supported White's claim to uphold their argument that Hinduism is an eco-friendly religion.[3] I explore all these claims through a case study of Keralan protestant Christians in South India, and an indigenous community in the same region. My research reveals that the Christian religion, which over time has engaged with indigenous and its various rituals and practices, and holds the long sacred tradition that considers nature to be sacred. The liturgical and sacramental life of the church reflects the sacred approach to nature, which offers a sense of activism in responding to environmental problems and defines quality environment as a sacred manifestation of environmental sustainability.

I focused on Protestant Christianity in Kerala intentionally because some of their rituals and practices reveal a non-anthropocentric approach to nature which helps to generate ecological behaviour and environmental activism. It is significant in this research that the Keralan Protestant Christians' views about nature supports White's argument that a new religious approach is necessary to maintain and sustain nature-human relationships.[4] White argues that it is primarily Latin Christianity (or Roman Catholicism) that originated the more anthropocentric attitudes towards nature and the human place on earth which ultimately led to the environmental crisis. Although he does not specifically comment on Protestantism, other scholars have argued that Protestantism does not conform to the broader critique of Christianity as

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[1] Lynn White Jr., 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis' *Science*, 155, 1967, 1206.
[2] Lynn White Jr., 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis', 1205.
[3] Vandana Shiva, *Earth Democracy: Justice Sustainability and Peace* (London: Zed Publications, 2006); Pankaj Jain, *Dharma and Ecology of Hindu Communities: Sustenance and Sustainability* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2011).
[4] Lynn White Jr., 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis', 1206.

the historic root of the ecological crisis that some interpreters of White have proposed, but was instead part of the cultural milieu in which environmentalism first emerged in Northern Europe and North America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[5] This thesis therefore aims to extend the investigation of environmental attitudes and behaviours among Protestant Christians outside North America and Europe and in that respect makes a distinctive and unique contribution to scholarly knowledge.

I have been motivated to do this study from my ecological experience, primarily inspired by my father, who was an evangelist in the South Kerala Diocese (SKD) of the Church of South India (CSI). His basic ecological and theological argument is that, "Christian life is rooted in spiritual conservation, which is grounded upon soil conservation and social conservation."[6] This theological affirmation is grounded in the religious experience of Protestant Christians in Kerala and indigenous communities, who consider nature to be sacred.

Protestant Christianity in Kerala follows some of the rituals and practices of the indigenous tradition and connects them within the worship and ministry of the church, which are mainly linked with the concern for sustaining resources of nature, maintaining nature conservation, ascribing intrinsic value to nature and assuring ecological justice. Although similar views regarding sustainability can be found in Andrew Dobson's discussion on environmental sustainability,[7] the Protestant ecological tradition in Kerala extends its ecological concerns by seeing environmentalism 'from below.'[8] The ecological tradition of the CSI churches view God's creations as sacred and the care for nature is well expressed in their environmental activism and theological views.

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[5] Michael S. Northcott, 'Reformed Protestantism and the Origins of Modern Environmentalism', *Philosophia Reformata* 83 (2018), 19-23; see also Mark Stoll, *Protestantism, Capitalism, and Nature in America*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997 and Belden Lane, *Ravished by Beauty: The Surprising Legacy of Reformed Spirituality* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

[6] Sermon preached at the CSI church, Valiyakuzhy during Harvest Festival Sunday; Joshua Job, Sermon Diary, (2004), 91.

[7] Andrew Dobson, *Justice and the Environment: Conceptions of Environmental sustainability* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[8] Kaveh L. Afrasiabi used the idea of 'environmentalism from below' to explain environmental activism based on the political and secular views about environmental protection. Kaveh L. Afrasiabi, 'The Environmental Movement in Iran,' *Middle East Journal* 57/3 (2003): 432-448; Northcott uses the perspective of 'from below' to explain the discourses of the sufferings. Michael S. Northcott, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 42. By studying Indian Christianity John C. B. Webster points out the social and political realities Christian communities. John C. B. Webster, *A History of Christianity: Northwest India Since 1800* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2007).

The term sacred in Malayalam[9] is *Vishudhi*, which means holy, pure, innocent.[10] In a primitive religious context the term *Vishudhi* (holy) refers to spiritual relationships with deities or ancestral spirits. This view has been presented by Catrien Notermans, Albertina Nugteren and Suma Sunny in relation to sacred groves in Kerala. They opine that, "Sacred groves are an age-old and world-wide phenomenon, traditionally consisting of forest zones, protected by people based on their spiritual relationship with the deities or ancestral spirits believed to reside there."[11] Freeman, in his study of gods and groves in Kerala, succinctly explains the sacred nature of groves. The sacred approach to nature is found in Kerala as a pre-Christian concept (*Sankalpa* – belief or imagination) that "a deity resides in, or regularly resorts to and uses a grove or garden that makes it a kavu: 'Our kavu here is a religious concept (sankalpam). These religious concepts pertain to a kavu that has the aura of a temple about it ... When we say kavu, this is a place of worship, exactly like a temple."[12] Nature worship strongly prevailed in the pre-Christian period.[13] In the primitive religious tradition *prakriti acharam* (practices in alignment with nature) has strongly prevailed,[14] a prime example being that of the Malayarayans in Kerala and other indigenous communities who regard stones as symbols of deities.[15]

Although Kerala has a long tradition of seeing agricultural practices as a form of sacred act,[16] in recent times, "land is rightly seen as the key development resource, and the economic aspirations of the people are closely linked to the products of the land."[17] However, the sacred approach to nature was intentionally eroded by the commercial agricultural interests of the Syrian Christians.[18] J. R.

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[9] Malayalam is the mother tongue of Kerala.
[10] Rev. H. Gundert, *Malayalam English Dictionary* (Mangalore: Basel Mission Book & Tract Depository, 1872), 961.
[11] Catrien Notermans, Albertina Nugteren and Suma Sunny, 'The Changing Landscape of Sacred Groves in Kerala (India): A Critical View on the Role of Religion in Nature Conservation' *Religions* 2016, 7, 38. file:///C:/Users/prasad/Downloads/religions-07-00038-v2%20(6).pdf
[12] J. R. Freeman, 'Gods, Groves and the Culture of Nature in Kerala' *Modern Asian Studies* 33, 2 (1999), 262. 257-302.
[13] K. Sreedharan, Environment and Development: Lessons from Kerala (Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala Bhasha Institute, 2013.
[14] Stanley G. Jayakumar, *Religion and Society* (New Delhi: MD Publications PVT LTD, 1996), 46-49.
[15] Jayakumar, *Religion and Society*, 1996, 45.
[16] K. Sreedharan, Environment and Development: Lessons from Kerala, 2013.
[17] Michael S. Northcott, *Life After Debt: Christianity and Global Justice* (London: SPCK, 1999), 162.
[18] In the words of A. Sreedhara Menon, the early Christians (St Thomas Christians) were called Syrian Christians because they followed the Syriac language and it became the language of the Mother Church of Persia with which the Church in Kerala had ecclesiastical communion from the 6th to the 16th centuries AD. It

Freeman observes that with the arrival of the Syrian Christians in the hilly areas of Kerala commercial cultivation spread out widely, which led to extensive commercial exploitation of timber.[19] Similar ways of clearing off thick forests were considered to be effective cultivation.[20] In the course of commercialising land and resources the concept of the sacred played a significant role in addressing the problems of deforestation in the State of Kerala.

Kerala has very long sacred traditions that reach back over millennia and my research shows they are well conserved within the spiritual engagements of Protestant Christianity. The land of Kerala was generally known as the place of sacred ponds, sacred groves and sacred sites. This green land was rich in biodiversity and the faith of Keralans was inextricably tied with sacred traditions. My study in the State of Kerala was mainly concentrated on the largest Protestant denomination – the Church of South India in the Diocese of Kerala. I selected the CSI as a representative church of the Christian religion in Kerala which dates back to the first millennium of the Common Era. The CSI came into existence as a union of Anglican, Presbyterian, Congregationalist and Methodist churches in 1947. The CSI constitutes 4.5% of the Christian religious adherents in Kerala,[21] the other principal denominations being Catholic and Syrian Orthodox/Mar Thoma.[22]

The mountains, hills, valleys and rivers of Kerala have a considerable role in explaining religious, cultural and economic history. Some of the most important pilgrim centres of Kerala are located either on the top of the hills or in the valleys. In the southern part of Kerala, Kurisumala Christian pilgrim centre is situated in the south end of Thiruvananthapuram District.[23] The word Kurisumala literally means

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was therefore only natural that Syriac became the sacred language of the Kerala church. A. Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History* (Kottayam: DC Books, 2007), 93.

[19] J. R. Freeman, 'Gods, Groves and the Culture of Nature in Kerala', 259.

[20] A. Sreedhara Menon, *Kerala District Gazetteers: Cannanore.* (Trivandrum: Government Press. 1972). 181.

[21] The 6.141 million Christians in 2011 consists of 3.744 million Catholics (61.0 percent of the total Christians), 977,000 Jacobite/ Orthodox Syrians (15.9 percent), 405,000 Mar Thoma Syrians (6.6 percent), 274,000 Church of South India (CSI) adherents (4.5 percent), 214, 000 Pentecost/ Church of God members (3.5 percent) and 160,000 Dalit Christians (2.6 percent). http://cds.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/WP468.pdf, viewed on 12/08/2017.

[22] A. Sreedhara Menon's historical account regarding the arrival of Christianity in Kerala reveals that the Apostle St. Thomas landed at Maliankara adjoining the seaport town of Muziris in 52 A.D. and converted several Brahmins and others, founded seven churches (seven and a half according to another version) on the Kerala Coast and left thereafter for the East Coast where he attained martyrdom at Mylapore. The seven churches founded by St Thomas in Kerala are located at Maliankara, Palyaur, Kottokavu, Kokkamangalam, Quilon, Niranam and Nilakkal. A. Sreedhara Menon, *Kerala History and its Makers* (Kottayam: DC Books, 1987, 43.

[23] http://www.kurisumala.org/history.php, viewed on 14/11/2015

Mount of the Cross. It lies about three thousand feet above sea level on the Western Ghats. The famous Thirunelli temple lies in the valley of the Brahmahiri peak, about five thousand feet above sea level. Sabarimala, one of the major Hindu pilgrim centres is situated in Peerumede, about three thousand feet from sea level.[24] The hills and mountains have thus come to have a religious halo in popular imagination. The river Periyar is connected with the traditions and legends that have grown around the name of the great Hindu school of thought, Advaita Philosophy. The famous Hindu festival Sivaratri is held every year on the banks of the river Aluva. Such places of religious importance as Aranmula, Maramon and Edwathwa are located on the river Pampa.[25] But at the same time the most important industrial centres of the state like Punalur, Elur, Kallai and Baliapatam have risen on the banks of the river.

Janaki Lenin portrays Indian sacred places in the forests. Her words depict a general view of the loss of biodiversity adjacent to the religious festival centres. She writes,

> it's festival time at a temple. Hordes of people in colourful clothes mill about, gaily lit shops sell souvenirs and articles for rituals, while itinerant vendors sell cheap plastic toys, religious posters, snacks, and assorted other merchandise. Discarded plastic bags, wrappers and shards of glass lie strewn underfoot. Nearby trees bear fresh injuries, their missing limbs going up in smoke in make-shift wood stoves. Detergent from washing laundry and human excreta pollute pools and streams. Loudspeakers from the temple blast religious music while people hold high decibel conversations… The stench of human excreta will take six weeks at least to dissipate. This is a generic experience of a festival celebrated in temples located in many of our forests. While this is a seasonal menace in some wilderness areas, in others it's a year-round nagging problem.[26]

Contrary to the above-mentioned current environmental realities in the region of Kerala, the pre-Christian ecological tradition of Kerala appeals to a religious metaphor of nature and re-imagines the sacredness of nature. The Keralan view regarding the sacredness of nature necessitates that proper attention is given to addressing the environmental crisis from both a theological and praxis centred perspective. My research reveals that CSI Christians believe that the sacredness of

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[24] http://sabarimala.kerala.gov.in/, viewed on 14/11/2015

[25] Maramon Convention is one of the biggest protestant pilgrim centres in India. Although this annual gathering is conducted by the Marthoma Church, it has got a wider participation form churches and faiths. http://mtconvention.com/home/, viewed on 14/11/2015

[26] http://www.firstpost.com/blogs/religion-vs-conservation-when-will-pilgrims-stop-polluting-our-forests-248313.html, viewed on 17/11/2015.

nature is to be highlighted to preserve the earth since preservation of the sacredness of the natural world is inextricably linked with the preservation of the purity of water, air and land.[27] The sacrality of nature is manifested in the theological and ritualistic practices of the CSI Christians in Kerala. I have examined the ecological and theological implications of the sacredness of nature in the second part of this thesis with the help of ethnographic field work conducted in Kerala.

Belief in the sacredness of the natural world is an ancient feature of many religio-cultural traditions but religious environmentalism is fundamentally modern.[28] Emma Tomalin's extensive study of Indian religious approaches to the environment holds the view that the phrase religious environmentalism consists of "the conscious, reflexive application of religious ideas to contemporary environmental concerns."[29] In this study I intend to follow this view in order to discuss the Indian religious approach to nature and present a theology of environmental sustainability by gathering resources from the ecological views of 'environmentalism from below.' I explore environmental sustainability from the subaltern communities because they "are the primary victims of the earth's distress, and maintain the rhythms of circularity and regenerative cycles of nature's economy by cultivating appropriate cosmovisions, observing related rituals, and practicing prudence in the ways they care about nature, harvest from nature, nurture nature, and in turn are nurtured."[30] As Timothy J Gorringe points out environmental discourses as an attempt towards a better human environment,[31] this study is concerned with framing a theology of environmental sustainability based on the views of environmentalism "from below" toward a healthy environment for all living and non-living beings.

By studying Indian religious ecological discourse, Lance E. Nelson commends that India has had its own religious traditions which speak about values which motivate human beings in their relations with nature.[32] Christopher E. Chapple

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[27] Stephen Devanesan, 'Christian Approach to World Environment Day Celebration' *Christhava Deepika*, 82 10 (2016), 36.
[28] Emma Tomalin, *Biodivinity and Biodiversity: The Limits of Religious Environmentalism* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), 11.
[29] Tomalin, *Biodivinity and Biodiversity: The Limits of Religious Environmentalism*, *2009*.
[30] Pramod Parajuli, 'Learning from Ecological Ethnicities: Toward a Plural Political Ecology of Knowledge' in John A. Grim, *Indigenous Traditions and Ecology: The Interbeing of Cosmology and Community* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 560.
[31] Timothy J. Gorringe, *A Theology of the Built Environment: Justice, Empowerment, Redemption* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 48.
[32] Lance E. Nelson, *Purifying the Earthly Body of God* (New York: State University Press of New York, 1998),2.

observes that in India mountains and rivers are considered sacred and are an integral part of human experience, remaining a source of both spiritual and economic strength.[33] It is widely accepted that in India sacred groves play a considerable role in keeping traditional conservation practices.[34]

Jain argues that each religious tradition is linked to its environment and it is possible to look into native traditions to see the way in which each absorbs the environment around it.[35] For example, in Indian religious traditions there are numerous rituals and myths in which rivers, trees, animals, and birds are revered. He blames the Judao-Christian approach to nature as a major factor and argues that this tradition promoted an anthropocentric approach to nature and favoured industrial growth and denuded natural resources of the planet earth.

Faith and values have a significant role to play in influencing Indian environmental discourse as "religion was, and remains today, the ultimate source of morality and meaning for most Indians."[36] Vandana Shiva, a prominent environmentalist in India, says that religions recognize the integrity of creation and the sanctity of life as a source of resistance to the destruction of nature.[37] She attributes divinity to nature and uses scriptural interpretation in explaining its values.[38] In order to strengthen her arguments she extracts her ecological world views from the Upanishad which mainly speaks about ethics.[39] She bases her arguments largely upon Hindu tradition and reflects upon ancient Hindu attitudes towards nature.[40] Without considering the Hindu nationalist agenda, she invariably draws upon Brahminical Hinduism to express her ecological ethics.[41] Her considerable projection of Brahminical Hinduism tends to ignore the diversity of other religious traditions in India including the Tribal and Adivasi traditions.

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[33] Christopher Key Chapple, 'Toward an Indigenous Indian Environmentalism,' in Lance E. Nelson, *Purifying the Earthly Body of God* (New York: State University Press of New York, 1998),18.
[34] Madhav Gadgil and Chandran, M., (1992). Sacred Groves. India International Centre Quarterly, 19, 1992,183-187.
[35] Pankaj Jain, *Dharma and Ecology of Hindu Communities* (London: Ashgate, 2011), 1.
[36] Ashutosh Varshney, 'Contested Meanings: India's National Identity, Hindu Nationalism, and the Politics of Anxiety,' *Daedalus* 123/3 (1993):245.
[37] Vandana Shiva, *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace* (London: Zed Books, 2005), 139.
[38] Vandana Shiva, *Stolen Harvest: The High jacking of the Global Food Supply* (London: Zed Books, 2001),5.
[39] Shiva, *Stolen Harvest: The High jacking of the Global Food Supply, 2001,* 17.
[40] Rita Das Gupta Sherma, *Sacred Immanence: Reflections of Ecofeminism in Hindu Tantra in* Lance E. Nelson, ed., *Purifying the Earthly Body of God* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998).
[41] Emma Tomalin, '*Bio-Divinity and Biodiversity: Perspectives on Religion and Environmental Conservation in India,*' Numen, 51 (2004): 289.

Tomalin has undertaken a valuable empirical study of Indian religious environmentalism which she argues emerged from the soil of the Hindu religious approach to nature. Tomalin argues that religious environmentalism is a product of social or cultural factors as well as a response to environmental change.[42] Her study of Indian religious environmentalism reveals that in India religion is a component of the environmental movement but not to the extent that one may imagine considering the high level of religiosity.[43] She sees it as the emergence of a new tradition, which she believes, could lead to oppression, marginalization or the silencing of voices.[44] Tomalin explains the romantic and pragmatic dimensions of Indian religious environmentalism and criticises the romanticisation of the poor's situation and its tendency to be co-opted by the Hindu Right.

Religious environmentalism has become dangerously politicised in recent decades with the intervention of Hindu nationalism which encourages people to look back in history for evidence that supports their own contemporary political agenda. Moreover, the activists from Hindu political movements like Sangh Parivar's use its expressions to project a Hindu nation in India based on an exclusivist religious nationalist vision,[45] which creates threats in using religions for propagating environmental concerns. In India, rivers are considered sacred, but all are polluted. Filthy water in the river Ganga is accepted as holy water by Hindu pilgrims. The cow is a sacred animal, but the pollution it makes in the vicinity of temples, streets and cities is accepted as the presence of a holy one. According to Tomalin,

> religious environmentalists seem to be concerned with proving that environmental awareness is an authentic feature of the Hindu tradition throughout its history, from pre-Vedic times to the present, and that the Hindu nationalist looks for evidence to support a view of Hinduism as the genuine and original Indian religiosity.[46]

Tomalin holds that the recognition of sacred ecology easily finds support from within Indian religious traditions, but at the same time she argues that there is an immense difference between the priorities and concerns of the modern environmentalist and the world views of much earlier religious thinkers. She argues that the poor of India cannot afford to put the "earth first" since they depend on nature for their daily

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[42] Tomalin, *Biodivinity and Biodiversity*, 2009,85.
[43] Tomalin, *Biodivinity and Biodiversity*, 2009, 122.
[44] Tomalin, *Biodivinity and Biodiversity*, 2009, 195.
[45] Nandini Deo and Duncan McDuie-Ra, *The politics of Collective Advocacy in India* (USA: Kumarian Press, 2011), 107.
[46] Tomalin, *Biodivinity and Biodiversity,* 2009, 285

survival. In this thesis I am particularly interested in investigating this claim and this is another reason for selecting the CSI as my core case study. Christians in India are on the whole not from the high but the lower castes in Indian society and therefore a study of Christianity and environmentalism in India will enable a critical and empirical consideration of the claim that there is a conflict between Indian religious environmental discourse and aims and the need and experiences of the poor. In this thesis I have uncovered evidence of a much stronger congruence between the environmental experiences of the poor, marginalised and Dalits in South India, and concepts and practices associated with the sacredness of nature which I have found to be embedded not only in Hindu but also in Christian and indigenous traditions.

Hinduism, which is the dominant religion in India, perceives everything through a sacred approach, but it doesn't seriously look at the environmental issues of the poor who suffer most. The destruction of the environment clearly poses the biggest threat to marginal cultures and occupations like those of tribals, nomads, fisherfolk and artisans, who have always been heavily dependent on their immediate environment for survival.[47] Although Shiva makes some attempts to speak for the poor, the tools she draws from Hindu religion to speak for the poor are not capable of dealing with the issues of the environmental victims. In order to speak for the victims of the environmental crisis, she borrows ecological ideologies from the West. However, the concept of environmental justice is infrequently heard in the discussions of Hindu religious environmentalists. Therefore, this study is structured with the aim that the sacred traditions of Keralan CSI Christians and Kani Tribal communities could offer a theological and praxis centred meaning of sacred nature which could contribute to environmental sustainability.

(ii). Research Purpose

Research Questions

1. Does the traditional Indian conception of nature as sacred contribute to environmental sustainability in India and in particular among Protestant Christians and indigenous people in Kerala?

[47] Anil Agarwal, *Report on Natural Resources for Food and Agriculture in the Asia and Pacific Region, Food and Agriculture Organisation* (Rome: FAO, 1986).

2. What is the relationship between the Indian conception of nature as sacred – which is strongest in the Vedas and what we might call 'environmentalism from above' and the voices of environmental victims or what we might call 'environmentalism from below'?
3. How does the distinctive social situation of Protestant Christianity among lower caste peoples and communities shape the environmental concerns as expressed in Christian organisations, rituals and theological beliefs, including the theology of ecological sustainability among Indian Christian theologians?

(iii). Methodology

To fulfil the aims of this study I used both text and ethnography-based methodologies. The Christians have a strong tradition of writing doctrinal, ethical and practical texts and Indian Christian literature is very extensive,[48] despite the percentage of Christians in India being relatively small. I would argue that the text and ethnography-based approach is necessary for four reasons. Firstly, I understand that there are multicultural traditions within each religion, but available literature only focuses on generalized notions of faith.[49] Secondly, much scholarship has been mainly quantitative in nature whereas the proposed study aims to focus on qualitative findings in order to gain clear evidence pertaining to the question of whether the sacred approach to nature influences local environmental issues.[50] The main religions in India are Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and tribal religions, and these religions have done considerable studies about ecological values and traditions. But studies about Christianity and ecology in India are completely text based. Thirdly, it is proposed to investigate to what extent pre-Christian ecological traditions in Kerala

[48] Daniel D. Chetti, *Ecology and Development: Theological Perspectives* (Madras: Gurukul Theological College, 1991); M. M. Thomas, Toward an Indigenous Christian Theology in Gerald H. Anderson (ed) *Asian Voices in Christian Theology* (Maryknoll New York: Orbis Books, 1976); Arvin P. Nirmal, 'Ecology, Ecumenics and Economics in Relation: A New Theological Paradigm' in Daniel D. Chetti (ed) Ecology and Development (Madras: Gurukul Publications, 1991); K. C. Abraham, *Liberative Solidarity: Contemporary Perspective on Mission*, (Thiruvalla, CSS, 1996); K.C. Abraham, *Eco-Justice*, (Bombay: BUILD, n.d.)

[49] A. J. Appasamy, *The Gospel and India's Heritage* (London: International Society for the Publication of Christian Knowledge, 1942); M. M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance* (London: SCM Press, 1970); Israel Selvanayagam, Relating to People of Other Faiths (Tiruvalla: CSS, 2004), Jacob Kavunkal, Anthropophany: Mission as Making New Humanity (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2008); Raymond Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany* (Mayknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1981).

[50] Geevarghese Coorilos Nalunnakkal, *Ethical Issues: Subaltern Perspectives* (Thiruvalla: CSS, 2007); K.C. Abraham, *Eco-Justice*, (Bombay: BUILD, n.d.). Abraham and Nalunnakkal have done ecological studies extensively both in academic and action centred dimensions. But their studies lack qualitative analysis in explaining environmental crisis in India.

influence the Christian approach towards the care for nature and care for the poor. Fourthly, this methodological approach intends to explore the past and present sacred discourses of ecological practices in Kerala to formulate a theology of environmental sustainability. It is argued that this approach is vital in proving the claim with substantial evidence that the Protestant Christianity in Kerala respects and preserves nature as the animistic traditions do toward nature. White's blame against the Christian approach to the animistic tradition can be re-examined in this situation from the comparative study based on the sacred tradition of the CSI Christians and the Kani tribe.

The sacred centred ecological tradition in Kerala vividly exposes a nature friendly approach, which prevailed in the pre-Christian period, and still prevails through religious beliefs and practices. This ecological tradition challenges the claims of Lynn White that, to a Christian, the object of nature is just a mere physical fact and is against sacred groves. Lynn White Jr holds the view that,

> To a Christian a tree can be no more than a physical fact. The whole concept of the sacred grove is alien to Christianity and to the ethos of the West. For nearly 2 millennia Christian missionaries have been chopping down sacred groves, which are idolatrous because they assume spirit in nature.[51]

Contrary to White's statement the Christian ecological tradition which is rooted in the pre-Christian ecological tradition in Kerala values trees and groves as sacred and is an inevitable part of sustainable life. Rev. John Abbs' missionary accounts reveal the fact that people in South Travancore had considered nature to be sacred and trees were considered as the sign of human survival.[52] I have drawn the same views from the communities which embraced Christianity in communities of South Kerala Diocese.

I selected four dioceses of the Church of South India in the Kerala and Kani Tribal settlement colony in Puravimala Forest area in Thiruvananthapuram. Both locations are part of Kerala State in South India. The concepts of the sacred and sustainability have been tied up with the life of religious communities which are exuberantly reflected in care for their homegardens. Kerala is known for maintaining homegardens effectively. D. Jose and N. Shanmugaratnam observe that homegardens in Kerala effectively serve as local ecosystems and significantly

[51] Lynn White,Jr., 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis', 1206.
[52] John Abbs, Twenty-Two Years of Missionary Experience in Travancore (London: John Snow & Co., Paternoster Row, 1870).

increase enhancement of habitat quality.[53] In rural areas each house is surrounded by homegardens which are filled with fruit trees, vegetable plants and flowering and ornamental plants. A study conducted by Allan Thomas, S. Baskaran, Sajan Kurian and Usha Thomas states that,

> this system (Homegarden) that has developed over years and dynamic has optimized production activities that satisfies the biophysical needs, socioeconomic security and environmental requirements in which they live.[54]

Moreover, Kerala has a long history of maintaining sacred groves.[55] CSI Christians preserve homegardens as a traditional practice which reveals their sacred approach to nature. I intend to examine their ecological traditions including worship, rituals, justice concerns and sustainability practices. This ethnographic approach is presented as a comparative study to the ecological traditions of the Kani tribe in Kerala who preserve the ecosystem of their living habitat as a sacred act.

The aim of the field work is to produce a case study as it is necessary to provide clear evidence of how ordinary people religiously look at environmental issues, and how their approach to the sacred is connected with their own environmental issues.[56] Case studies provide a way of doing research involving the investigation of real-life circumstances and can offer a richness of details[57] allowing the researcher to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events.[58] As Robson says, the case study is a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence.[59]

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[53] D. Jose and N. Shanmugharatnam, 'Traditional Homegardens of Kerala: A Sustainable Human Ecosystem' *Agroforestry Systems*, 24, 2 (1993), 203-213.

[54] Hush Allan Thomas, S. Baskaran, Sajan Kurian and Usha Thomas, Kerala Home Gardens Nurturing Biodiversity, http://leisaindia.org/articles/kerala-home-gardens-nurturing-biodiversity/ viewed on 11/12/2014.

[55] U.M. Chandrashekara , S. Sankar, 'Ecology and management of sacred groves in Kerala, India', *Forest Ecology and Management*, 112 (1998) 165-177.

[56] James B. Martin-Schramm & Robert L. Stivers argue that one of the advantages of the case study approach is that cases provide a setting to observe relationships between individuals and communities. Communities shape moral character, establish boundaries, produce loyalties, and create frame works of accountability. James B. Martin-Schramm & Robert L. Stivers, *Christian Environmental Ethics A Case Method Approach (*New York: Orbis Books, 2003),48.

[57] Pete Sanders & Paul Wilkins, *First Step in Practitioner Research* (Herefordshire: PCCS Books Ltd, 2010).157

[58] Yin, RK, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Oaks, CA, Sage, 2003).2

[59] Robson, C, *Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner Researchers* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1993).5

Ethnographic research methods involve the collection of information about the material products, social relationships, beliefs, and values of a community.[60] It is used to define a research problem.[61] Through this ethnographic research, I intend to focus on understanding local[62] populations in broader environmental and religious contexts, based on the concepts of the sacred and sustainability. Understanding local context is essential to draw local experience and cultural observations,[63] as this enables the researcher to "describe their beliefs, norms, behaviours, and motivations."[64]

Through this ethnographic research I sought to have an "engagement in direct learning through physical and social involvement in the field setting."[65] Therefore, I observed and recorded the daily activities of members of the community and identified important key informants who have a broad knowledge of the research setting. In the words of Stephen L. Schensul, Jean J. Schensul and Margaret D. Lecompte the key informants –

> have gained their knowledge by virtue of their position and experience in the community, their established network of relationships, their ability to express themselves orally, and their broad understanding of their community.[66]

I used the knowledge and presence of local leaders who are recognised as opinion leaders in order to gather their mind set and daily life. I kept confidentiality and anonymity in gathering data from the ethnographic study locations. I used all data honestly and kept confidentiality for the successful completion of this study. I have assured all the interviewees that all data will not be shared with other research students or parties, and I will keep my integrity in using data confidentially and truthfully.

My fieldwork was mainly divided into two stages. The first stage of my field work was carried out in connection with the ecological background and contributions of the four Dioceses of the Church of South India in Kerala; Malabar Diocese, East

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[60] Uwe Flick, *Doing Ethnographic and Observational Research* (London: Sage Publications, 2007).xv
[61] Uwe Flick, *Doing Ethnographic and Observational Research*, 21.
[62] The term local refers to the communities, organizations, workplaces, schools, and other population collectives that are spatially defined and within which ethnographers communicate face to face with research participants and collect primary data. Stephen L. Schensul, Jean J. Schensul and Margaret D. LeCOMPTE, *Essential Ethnographic Methods* (London, Altamira Press, 1999),7.
[63] Stephen L. Schensul, Jean J. Schensul and Margaret D. Lecompte, *Essential Ethnographic Methods* (London: Altamira Press, 1999),5.
[64] Stephen L. Schensul, Jean J. Schensul and Margaret D. Lecompte, *Essential Ethnographic Methods*, 1999, 4.
[65] Stephen L. Schensul, Jean J. Schensul and Margaret D. Lecompte, *Essential Ethnographic Methods*, 1999, 72
[66] Stephen L. Schensul, Jean J. Schensul and Margaret D. Lecompte, *Essential Ethnographic Methods*, 1999, 84

Kerala Diocese, Kollam - Kottarakkara Diocese and the South Kerala Diocese. Each Diocese has an ecological department, which actively engage within the Diocese and society at large. In 1990 I associated with the Kerala Regional Youth Assembly (constituted by the four diocese of Kerala) and pursued environmental concerns by upholding the theme; "Good news to all creations." During my service as priest from 1999 I concentrated on highlighting environmental concerns through different programmes such as seminars, workshops, tree planting and vegetable cultivation programmes. Although I am familiar with the geographical location of my case study, I carried out my field work in my capacity as a researcher and not as a priest. I visited diocesan offices, local parishes, educational institutions, environmental activists and farmers. I interviewed 33 people from four dioceses and gathered material such as programme reports, leaflets, newsletters, diocesan journals, special liturgies, song books, Bible study materials and sermon outlines. During my visit I gave special attention to learn how local parishes and institutions keep their campus with an eco-friendly approach. When I visited farmers, they arranged a tour of their farm, which was useful to know how they interconnect ecological consciousness and spirituality in maintaining biodiversity locally.

Because interviewing is considered productive resource,[67] I considered interviews as an important means in my fieldwork. I followed the method of open-ended interview throughout my fieldwork. An ethnographic interview is open–ended in nature – it flows conversationally and accommodates digressions, which may well open up new avenues of inquiry that the researcher had not originally considered.[68] It is intended to probe for meaning, to explore nuances, to capture the grey areas that might be missed in either/or questions that merely suggest the surface of an issue.[69] According to Smith the interviewer begins with the most general possible question and leads the respondent to talk about the subject.[70] My interviews consist of topic-initiating and follow-up questions relating to my research subject; the concept of sacred nature and sustainability. This interview process provided the

[67] Stephen L. Schensul, Jean J. Schensul and Margaret D. Lecompte, *Essential Ethnographic Methods*, 1999, 121-145.
[68] Uwe Flick, *Doing Ethnographic and Observational Research*, 2007, 42-43.
[69] Uwe Flick, *Doing Ethnographic and Observational Research*, 2007, 43.
[70] J. A. Smith, Semi-structured interviewing and qualitative analysis. In Jonathan A. Smith, Rome Harre, & Luk van Langenhove, eds., *Rethinking methods in psychology* (London: Sage.1995), 9–26).

possibility of gaining detailed and comprehensive response from the interviewee.[71] With the help of field assistants I completed the interviews of my first stage within a four-week period.

The second stage of field work and interviews were conducted at Puravimala Kani Tribal settlement in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. I interviewed seven people from Puravimala. The aim of this stage of fieldwork was to investigate their ecological consciousness, approach to nature, rituals, moral practices and sustainable living. To draw more data with regard to their religious approach to nature I visited their worship centre, agricultural locations, primary school, primary health centre and a grocery shop. I was very keen to explore the ecological psychology of this tribal community. In ethnographic research ecological psychology has been used as a method to study the ecological consciousness of communities. This approach is also employed to investigate the pre-Christian views on nature which are revealed in Christian traditions. Ecological psychologists analyse naturally occurring human behaviour and the relationships between human behaviour and its environment.[72] Ecopsychology offers a subjective environment which can be called a psychological habitat.[73] In an ethnographic context a psychological habitat is described in terms of the emotional reaction to the environment. This approach in my study is important as some of the Keralan Christians' beliefs and practices are linked to the ecological behaviour of pre-Christian traditions. Therefore, in order to examine whether Lynn White's criticism of the Christian approach to indigenous traditions is correct in the Keralan context,[74] the careful comparative study of the sacred tradition of Keralan Christians and the Kani Tribal community will be of immense value in challenging similar views about the Christian approach to nature

I spent considerable effort trying to conceptualize the nature of the ecological world concealed in their behaviour. Their behaviour setting is linked with ecological environment which is indissolubly tied with cultural practices such as Koduthi, sacrifice for rain and agriculture. I identified their behaviour setting as an environmental unit which is central to this work. Their ecological behaviour is clearly

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[71] Timothy John Rapley, *The Art of Open-ended Interviewing: Some Considerations on Analyzing Interviews* (London, Sage Publications, 2001),315

[72] Phil Schoggen, 'Ecological psychology and mental retardation', in G. Sackett (ed), *Observing behavior. Vol. I. Theory and applications in mental retardation* (Baltimore, MD: University Park Press, 1978), 33. (33-62).

[73] R. G. Barker and H. F. Wright, *Midwest and its children: The Psychological Ecology of an American Town (New York: Harper & Row, 1955),* 10-12.

[74] Lynn White,Jr., 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis' *Science*, 155, 1967, 1205.

manifested in their physical properties, human components and moral practices. Barker and Wright highlight this type of behaviour setting as a source to understand the background of certain cultural locations.[75] This approach is necessary because informants and their environment are interdependent. In my effort to know their ecological behaviour setting I visited their sacred grove, temple and festival centre. As Barker says, similar sites are the centres attached with ecological behaviour.[76] This has helped me in my next stage to describe and analyse all data holistically about their beliefs and practices. Since I dealt with all data holistically the central concept of my research "sacred" seemed in my analysis to be a centrally focused and discursive subject.

I gave special attention to their life systems in the past and present. Although there are considerable studies about indigenous practices in the past such as hunter gathering and shifting cultivation, I gave special attention in this ethnographic study to examine their ecological transmission from one generation to the next. For this exploration I had an opportunity to interact with Parappan Kani who is the eldest member of this tribal colony. I have used those materials systematically in chapter five to explain indigenous nature friendly practices and sacred traditions. This has given me sufficient data both from the field and other related previous studies by ethnographers to "compare systematically sequences of human social interactions as constrained by social structures."[77] In their historical journey there were a series of incidents, and the one among them is restriction in their traditional practices such as hunter gathering and shifting cultivation.

The anthropological perspective that informs this deployment of field derived data, interviews and investigations of my subjects living environments is the symbolic interactionist perspective as developed by Schutz and others. The core insight of symbolic insights is that human actions (including spoken) are meaningful as they are goal directed and based on reasoning about the physical and social circumstances that persons find themselves in.[78]

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[75] Roger G. Barker and Herbert F. Wright, *Midwest and its children: The Psychological Ecology of an American Town (New York: Harper & Row, 1955),* 9.
[76] Roger G. Barker. 'Need for an Eco-Behavioural Science, in Roger G. Barker & Associates (ed) *Habitats, Environments, and Human Behaviour* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1978), 36-48.
[77] Andrew Abbott, From Causes to Events: Notes on Narrative Positivism, *Sociological Methods and Research*, 20 (1992). 428.
[78] Alfred Schutz, Commonsense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action, in Maurie Natanson, (ed), Alfred Schutz *Collected Papers*, 1 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962).

What was needed in this research is the generation and imaginative use of ideas that guided the researcher's exploration and interpretation of the social world.[79] The interpretation process played a considerable role in constructing the environmental theology, because it consists of what was found, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, making inferences, building linkages, and attaching meanings.[80] It is understood that this process has enabled the researcher to explain the findings meaningfully. Apart from the above-mentioned stage I included two other methods of interviews; telephonic interviews and email interviews.

I have used the original names of the interviewees in both locations as they have all given written consent to be named in the research analysis. Although the concept of the sacred is understood with some differences, views of their religious perspectives to care for nature have been expressed with common ecological concerns. Therefore, I sought proper guidance from the activists not to be lost in cultural and religious meanings of the responses of the informants.

The major finding which emerged during my primary level of study, is that CSI faith communities hold a strong ecological tradition which is revealed in its worship, liturgies, rituals and environmental activism. It is clear that the Keralan Christian ecological tradition is comparable to the indigenous communities who also affirm nature as sacred. The ecological behaviour of both traditions reveals a high sense of ethical and moral principles and formulates environmentalism "from below" which demands for a quality environment, and it can be used as relevant sources to formulate theology of environmental sustainability.

[79] Amanda Coffey & Paul Atkinson, *Making Sense of Qualitative Data: Complementary Research Strategies,* 156.
[80] Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* (London: Sage, 1990),423.

(iv). Summary of Chapters

Apart from the Introduction this thesis consists of seven Chapters and a Conclusion. Chapter 1 & 2 form the first part of this thesis.

In Chapter 1 the contemporary crisis in Indian religious environmentalism is examined. This chapter discusses the Indian sacred cosmic tradition which affirms the sacredness of nature. Different approaches to environmentalism are briefly discussed in order to explain the unsettled issues of using the concept of the sacred in Indian environmentalism. The glorified myth from the past regarding the thinking of nature as sacred, is analysed in this chapter based on the perspective of environmentalism of the poor.

Chapter 2 is concerned with religious environmentalism in general and Indian religious environmentalism in particular. It offers a critical analysis of Lynn White Jr's challenging essay "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis'' by examining whether the Christian approach to nature contributed to the ecological crisis. This is achieved by discussing Christian ethics, environmental justice and environmentalism 'from below.' The liturgical engagement of worshiping communities and their liberative ideas regarding the environment are also briefly discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 3, 4, 5 & 6 form the second part of this thesis.

Chapter 3 examines the background of my field research and introduces the ethnographic study about the ecological landscape of the four dioceses of the Church of South India in the state of Kerala and an indigenous community in the Kani tribal colony at Puravimala in Thiruvananthapuram. This chapter explains briefly the method used to understand the ecological landscapes, and also introduces the concepts emerged from the ethnographic study that nature is sacred, nature is the body of God and nature is a sign of environmental sustainability.

Chapter 4 is concerned with the concept of the sacred and the pragmatic ecclesial dimension of Indian Christian religious environmentalism. The analytical study employed in this chapter explains how the concept of the sacred ecclesiologically regards ordinary places as sacred places and creates and sustains ecological consciousness among worshiping communities. This chapter highlights worship and rituals as the centre of transmitting ecological consciousness from one generation to another and explains to what extent Christian environmental activism is connected to the ecclesial and mission paradigm of local congregations and Christian institutions. It also points out the scope of Christian environmental pragmatism in the promotion of an inter-religious approach to caring for the earth.

Chapter 5 provides a detailed study of the ecological world of the Kani tribes who live in the Puravimala tribal colony in Kerala. The chapter is concerned with their rituals and practices which are deeply connected with their sacred approach to the preservation of nature. Their nature conservation and resource management such as shifting cultivation, hunter gathering and knowledge system portrays their ecological consciousness to live in their habitats without destroying their life-sustaining properties for future generations. It also discusses their sustainability practices and resource management based on the perspective of environmentalism 'from below.' Their important ritual, known as Koduthi, manifests an indigenous holistic approach to environmental sustainability.

Chapter 6 examines the voices of the poor and Indian Christian environmentalism. The environmental victims raise their voices as a manifestation of their commitment to environmental justice. Based on the religious approach to environmental justice, this chapter analyses the people's protest against the Vilappilsala Waste Decomposing Plant and another protest against the Kasturirangan Commission Report. Both protests emerged 'from below' as environmental movements and upholds the view that Christian environmentalism 'from below' stands for the sustainability of all living and non-living beings. The question relating to the perspective of 'people first' is also explored by examining the poor communities' approach towards the English Indian Clays Limited, Thiruvananthapuram. It concludes that unprotected land and unprotected people are the signs of environmental crisis and sustainability means giving freedom to the poor.

Chapter 7 considers the formation of a relevant theology of sustainability. Theological ground has been formulated from the major findings from ethnographic

study locations, from Indian Christian theologians' ecological discussions, sermons, rituals and sacraments. An environmental theology emerges from the metaphor of, 'nature as the body of God'. The brokenness of nature is understood here as the broken body of God, and the sharing of the body of God in the Eucharist invites people to repair the broken relationship between human beings and nature. This chapter sees suffering from below as a theological category toward environmental sustainability. The sustainable living realities of Dalits, tribal communities and the poor communities in the villages are placed in theological engagement as resources. This chapter ends with a discussion about freedom to quality environment as a theological alternative for environmental sustainability.

Part 1

Chapter 1

The Contemporary Crisis of Indian Religious Environmentalism

1.1. Introduction

Environmental movements in India have recently begun to adopt religious traditions and teachings to argue that religions offer an eco-friendly way of life. Religious beliefs have been re-presented and reinterpreted to speak about environmental concerns and the destruction of the natural environment. Religious traditions related to the natural world teach that the earth is sacred and has an intrinsic value and provide ethical teachings to guide the believer towards an environmentally friendly way of life. The care for nature has been brought into contemporary environmental discussions as an ethical approach to the preservation of the natural world. Religious environmentalism in India is predominantly explained from the viewpoint of Hindu religious tradition, which notes that, "man was looked upon as part of nature, linked by indissoluble spiritual and psychological bonds with the elements around him."[1] The Hindu tradition of reverence for nature is re-applied as an ancient religious and ethical foundation upon modern environmental discourse. However, the alarming rate of environmental problems in India reveals that speaking about an "eco-golden age"[2] does not produce sufficient results in addressing current environmental problems. This new traditionalist approach tends to see everything in nature to be sacred and portrays harmonious social relationship ignoring the ecological life of the poor and the victims of environmental problems.[3] However, looking at the ground of Indian secular and the Christian approach to the environment reveals that there seems to be an ambiguity embedded in the Hindu religious approach by seeing nature to be sacred.

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[1] Assisi Declarations, Messages on Humanity and Nature from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism & Judaism. http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/THE%20ASSISI%20DECLARATIONS.pdf, viewed on 12/07/2016.
[2] Emma Tomalin, Bio-Divinity and Biodiversity: Perspectives on Religion and Environmental Conservation in India, *Numen,* 51,3 (2004), 268
[3] Tomalin, Bio-Divinity and Biodiversity: Perspectives on Religion and Environmental Conservation in India, 265-295.

This chapter examines some of the religious and secular approaches to the environment – Hindu, secular and the Christian, and argues that the contemporary religious environmentalism of India, widely explained by the Hindu religious traditions, glorifies the myths of the past in speaking about nature and does not pay sufficient attention to environmental activism. Although Indian religions are considered to be powerful mediums to propagate environmental concerns, the relationality of care for nature and care for the poor has not been well discussed. Considering this reality Tomalin opines that religion often enters the environmental debates in India for pragmatic rather than romantic reasons.[4] From the secular perspective Meera Nanda claims that most poor people participate in environmental movements for secular reasons. She reports that in study after study, it came to light that the primary motivation of poor people to take action on behalf of the trees, rivers and land was their interest in a better life materially for themselves and for their children.[5] Based on the above mentioned powerful arguments by Tomalin and Nanda, this chapter aims at a clear investigation of the Hindu, secular and the Christian perspectives in order to authentically re-examine how the approach of sacred to nature contributes to sustainability in Indian environmental discourse.

1.2. Indian Religious Traditions and the Environment

Indian religious traditions speak widely about nature and propagate ecological concerns extensively.[6] From a detailed analysis of Indian religious environmentalism Tomalin opines that religion has a special and unique role to play in averting environmental problems more widely.[7] Analogously O. P. Dwivedi believes that religion can be used in India to bring environmental awareness to people by explicating the technological and environmental meaning of nature. His general finding is that religion has a substantial part to play in enabling humankind to understand their unlimited tendency to extract resources from nature. In his words

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[4] Tomalin, *Biodivinity and Biodiversity*, 2009, 175.
[5] Meera Nanda, *Dharmic Ecology and the Neo-Pagan International: The Dangers of Religious Environmentalism in India,* 2004.
[6] S. W Bakhle, *Hinduism: Nature and Development* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd,1991). Madeleine Biardeau, *Hinduism: The Anthropology of a Civilization* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989). Ashish Dalela, *Mystic Universe: An Introduction to Vedic Cosmology* (Pasadena, CA: Shabda Press, 2016). Kamal Kumar Dua, *Bhagavad Gita and Environment* (Delhi, India: Koshal Book Depot, 1999). Pankaj Jain, *Dharma and Ecology of Hindu Communities* (London: Ashgate, 2011).
[7] Emma Tomalin, *Biodivinity and Biodiversity*, 282.

> The effectiveness of any religion in protecting the environment depends upon how much faith its believers have in its precepts and injunctions. Its value also depends upon how those precepts are transmitted and adapted in every day social interactions.[8]

Contemporary environmental discourse has become an amalgamation of various voices which arise from religious debates, environmental movements and partially from political movements. The present Indian environmental pragmatic efforts show the fact that among these voices, religious environmentalists have a significant role to play in influencing the masses as they use different religious approaches to nature in the portrayal of their environmental values. Religious environmentalists in India portray nature as an integral part of human experience, and they connect it to spiritual and economic strength. Mountains and rivers have been considered to be sacred in India and according to Christopher Key Chapple, "the land of India, its ecosystem, its climate, its agriculture uses, its cities, its economy, and its unique social and religious history require a different environmental strategy."[9] He finds religion to be a powerful source to disseminate environmental concerns on a large scale among the Indian masses.

Gosling reveals a general view of Indians about preservation of nature by referring to the Indian delegates who shared their ecological voice at the Earth Summit. He remarks that of the one hundred non-governmental organizations registered at the Earth Summit, many couched their aims in cultural and religious terms, which included quotations from the Upanishads, and references to sacred groves, Ashoka's pillar edicts, the Chipko and Appiko movements, and Gandhian ethics. However, he observes that although members of Indian environmental organizations are proud of their country's scientific achievements, they are critical of GM crops, nuclear power, and their response to new technologies are more in the form of questions and calls for more or improved testing of products rather than outright opposition.[10] From his careful study of Indian religion and ecology,[11] he opines that Hinduism accommodated a theological conception of the unity of all reality, and Buddhism as having nurtured environmental values with a theological

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[8] O. P. Dwivedi, 'Dharmic Ecology', in Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker (eds), *Hinduism and Ecology* (Massachachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), 16.
[9]Christopher Key Chapple, 'Toward an Indigenous Indian Environmentalism,' in Lance E. Nelson (ed) *Purifying the Earthly Body of God* (New York: State University Press of New York, 1998), 19.
[10] David L. Gosling, *Science and the Indian Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2007), 4.
[11] David L. Gosling, *Religion and ecology in India and Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge, 2001).

notion of care and responsibility towards all living things with pragmatic concerns. He argues that many NGOs working on local environmental issues confirm the positive legacy of Indian religions which offers hope for future reconstruction.

Pankaj Jain delineates a potential role of the Indian religious concept of Dharma in leading nature conservation effectively.[12] Jain believes that religion can be used as a tool to propagate the relationship between humans and nature in protecting the environment. On the basis of his study about the relationship between religion and ecology David L. Gosling argues that religions have possible ways to create ecological consciousness.[13] Currently there are many creative efforts from academics and environmental activists to gather religious traditions and concepts for disseminating environmental concerns. Although all of them have different approaches to environmental concerns, an in-depth study is necessary to ascertain how Indian religious environmentalism contributes to environmental sustainability by assuring quality life for living and non-living beings, including environmental victims.

Vandana Shiva, an Indian environmentalist and economist draws a number of Hindu religious ideologies in formulating approaches to mitigate environmental problems nationally and globally. Her discussion of earth democracy plays a significant role in influencing mass attention. She claims that it is necessary to protect freedoms, to maintain earth's life support systems, to ensure justice and sustainability, to end conflict and maintain peace.[14] Although Shiva makes attempts to draw on religious metaphors in explaining environmentalism her efforts often face difficulty in linking Western ideologies such as democracy and justice with her religious traditions. She strongly argues that the "Western religious traditions encourage domination and control over nature, thus bear a special burden of responsibility for the tragic state of the natural environment today."[15] She finds Eastern religious traditions are more ecologically related. However, Vasudha Narayanan raises a pertinent question that, "if Eastern traditions, including Hinduism, are so eco-friendly, why do the countries in which these religions have been practiced have such a lamentable record of ecological disasters and rampant

[12] Pankaj Jain, *Dharma and Ecology of Hindu Communities* (London: Ashgate, 2011).
[13] David L. Gosling, *Religion and Ecology in India and Southeast Asia* (London and New York, Routledge, 2001).
[14] Vandana Shiva, *Earth Democracy. Justice Sustainability and Peace* (London: Zed Books Ltd,2005), 74.
[15] Vasudha Narayanan, 'Wood, and Wisdom: Ecological Perspectives from the Hindu traditions', *Daedalus*, 130 (2001), 197.

industrialisation?"[16] Narayanan's question has been minimally addressed in Indian environmental discussions, but I maintain that more attention needs to be given to the answers of this question. I believe that an attempt to understand the Hindu approaches to environmentalism can answer how far this religion justifies its role in addressing the ecological crisis.

1.3 The Hindu Approach to Environment

Hindu environmentalists argue that Hinduism gave rise to numerous ecologically sound traditions and practices.[17] In Hindu religious tradition certain trees, animals, water and mountains were considered sacred. David Lee points out that the Hindu epic Ramayana itself is a portrayal narrated ecologically with the images of forests and gardens and shows classical knowledge of and attitude toward nature.[18] He argues that the Hindu epics can play a significant role in popularising messages about nature and the preservation of natural history. Mayanka Kala and Aruna Sharma hold the view that through worshipping trees, animals and sacred groves conservation of nature is nurtured and continued.[19] They believe that by nurturing trees and growing fruit and sharing them with one another creates a social environment that could offer sustainability.

The Hindu approach to nature which is widely discussed and practiced in contemporary environmental discourses such as devotional and renouncer approach and cosmological approach is said to be the centre of the sacred approach to environmental sustainability. However, these approaches are limited to within elite communities and create Hindu nationalistic ideas which divide Indian society and the crisis of Indian religious environmentalism is well reflected in the Hindu approaches to the natural world. In order to make this argument clearer, I intend to begin my discussions by explaining the different approaches to the environment and some of the issues related to seeing nature human relationship.

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[16] Narayanan, 'Wood, and Wisdom: Ecological Perspectives from the Hindu traditions', 197.
[17] Anil Agarwal *Can Hindu Beliefs and Values Help India Meet Its Ecological Crisis?,* 2000, Pankaj Jain, *Dharma and Ecology of Hindu Communities* (London: Ashgate, 2011).
[18] David Lee, 'The Natural History of Ramayana', in Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker (eds), *Hinduism and Ecology* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press,2000), 246 – 247.
[19] Mayanka Kala and Aruna Sharma , Tradditional Indian Beliefs: A Key Toward Sustainable living, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/226961418_Traditional_Indian_beliefs_A_key_toward_sustainable_living, viewed on 21/01/2019.

1.3.1 Devotional and Renouncer Approach to Environmentalism

Scholars of Indian religious environmental ethics speak of two models in Indian religious environmentalism; the devotional model and renouncer model.[20] The devotional model represents a romantic approach and the renouncer model represents a pragmatic approach. For Jain, these models are based on the distinction between householders and ascetics. Householders perform devotional and ritualistic activities whereas ascetics perform austere practices.[21] Scholars such as Anne Feldhaus, David Haberman, and Vasudha Narayanan employ the devotional approach to explain environmental issues.[22] It is a fact that people who are part of the devotional model do not reject ascetics. They give respect to the ascetics, and at the same time they perform their daily rituals, puja in homes and temples.[23] They continue to attend discourses by ascetics and pay their respect to them but their own practices largely consist of daily rituals, puja, at home and at temples.

The Renouncer approach is linked with the yogic tradition. Patanjali authored a brief text called Yoga Sutra explaining "an advance mode for gaining control over one's compulsive behaviour through mastery of the body, mind, and spirit continuum."[24] Emerging as an amalgamation of yogic traditions geared by Buddhist and Jain yoga sutras, renunciation of worldly attachment and the adaptation of a strict ethical and ascetic code was formulated; this tradition is known as the Sramanical tradition. Based on this ethical commitment the idea of ahimsa (non-violence) was developed and the avoidance of injury to any creature became the central point of the renouncer model. In this tradition five positive ethical practices were upheld; purity, contentment, austerity, study, and devotion.[25] Christopher Key

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[20] Pankaj Jain, *Dharma and Ecology of Hindu Communities*, 6.
[21] Jain, *Dharma and Ecology of Hindu Communities*, 2011, 6.
[22] See; Anne Feldhaus, *Water and Womanhood: Religious Meanings of Rivers in Maharashtra* (New York: Oxford University Press,1995); David Haberman, *River of Life in an Age of Pollution: The Yamuna River of Northern India,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Vasudha Narayanan, 'One Tree is Equal to Ten Sons: Hindu Response to the Problems of Ecology, Population and Consumption,' *Journal of American Academy of Religion*, 65, 1997.
[23] T. N. Madan, *Non-Renunciation: Themes and Interpretations of Hindu Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).
[24] Chapple, Toward an Indigenous Indian Environmentalism, 24. He states that, "Traces of yogic practices can be found in the ruins of Mohenjodaro and Harappa, with documentation of organized Yoga appearing in the early Upanishads, the Buddhist Sutra, and the early text of Jainism. By probably the second century of the common era, Patanjali summarized and systematized various styles of yogic renunciation in his Yoga Sutra.
[25] Chapple, 'Toward an Indigenous Indian Environmentalism', 26.

Chapple opines that these vows and observances prevailed as the core of India's ethical fabric for over two millennia and played a key role in familiarising a monastic approach within the subcontinent.

The devotional and ascetic models can contribute considerably to India's environmental movements. Jain suggests that the ascetic model can help reduce the ruthless exploitation of natural resources by limiting one's desire for more luxuries and that the devotional model can help restore natural resources to their original beauty and harmony.[26] He argues strongly that a proper education is necessary, although India has different models in defence of the ecosystem.[27] Undoubtably, these approaches can ethically influence people, but they are unable to attract the masses in an effective way because they are religiously enshrined by the upper strata of the cast centred Indian social system.

The Ascetic or Yogic approach was the lifestyle of Gandhi based on his principle of non-violence. Gandhi committed himself to an ordinary life similar to that of "sannyasins" (yogic) and considered the whole world as his family, but was never affiliated to any institutionalised ascetic traditions. Through his ascetic practices he equated dharma with truth and nonviolence. He said, "The only virtue I want to claim is Truth and Nonviolence."[28] For him truth was his strategy and ahimsa was his method."[29] He popularised the concept of ahimsa during his freedom struggle movement. For him ahimsa was religion. He claimed himself not as visionary, but as practical idealist.

Indian environmentalism is deeply rooted with Gandhian religion as ahimsa has strong connections with native cultural ecomanagement practices.[30] Christopher Key Chapple observes that Gandhian notions of *ahimsa* (nonviolence) are insufficient to bring about the changes needed to make India more environmentally

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[26] Jain, *Dharma and Ecology of Hindu Communities*, 2011, 6.

[27] Chapple makes an attempt to link with Sramanical tradition. In his words, a proper reading of Sramanical tradition will reveal that the renouncer tradition was keen in upholding its ethical stand by keeping distance from worldly involvement. In the words of Chapple, the Sramanical tradition focusses on interior processes and advocates detachment from worldly concerns. Christopher Key Chapple, 'Toward an Indigenous Indian Environmentalism' in Lance E. Neson (ed), *Purifying the Earthly Body of God* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 34.

[28] Mahatma Gandhi, Discussion with Poona Sanathanists (December 7, 1932) CWG, Vol 58, 478.

[29] Shiva, *Earth Democracy Justice, Sustainability and Peace,* 2005,116-117.

[30] N. Patrik Peritore, 'Environmental Attitudes of Indian Elites: Challenging Western Postmodernist Models', *Asian Survey* 33, 1993.807.

conscious.[31] Similarly Chapple points out that Gandhi's non-violence centred values such as truth, non-stealing, non-possession and celibacy point to the limiting of consumption of resources in order to reduce the burden on ecology.[32] Shiva defines *ahimsa* from her religious point of view and uses this concept to explain the relationship between ecology and economics. According to her our system of production, trade, and consumption should not use up the ecological space of other species and other people.[33] It is her opinion that *himsa* (violence) is the result of the usurping and enclosing of the dominant economic structures and economic organization over the ecological space of other species and other people. From her religious knowledge based on the Isho Upanishad she affirms that violent economic order constitutes non-sustainable consumption and non-sustainable production. That means ahimsa deals with sustainability by revealing the culture of conservation and the culture of caring and sharing. In her words, "Ahimsa combines justice and sustainability at a deep level. "Not taking more than you need" ensures that enough resources are left in the ecosystem for other species and the maintenance of essential ecological process to ensure sustainability. It also ensures that enough resources are left for the livelihoods of diverse groups of people."[34] Shiva's attempt to define ahimsa is not connected with the ascetic or yogic tradition, it is seen as an amalgamation of the Western ideologies and the Gandhian concept of ahimsa. It is the opinion of Vasudha Narayanan that the ascetic model is mostly limited to intellectual elites and their philosophical discussions.[35]

Contemporary ascetic institutions do not favour the Gandhian way of action-oriented environmentalism, promoting instead that their believers worship certain trees, rivers and mountains. Today in India the solitary ascetic is linked with ashrams which have not yet widely influenced people regarding the propagation of environmental values. Indian religious ideologies of asceticism and devotional nature generally characterise the state of 'vanaprasthashrama.'[36] According to this practice the forest is considered to be the site of the third of the four classical Hindu stages of

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[31] Christopher Key Chapple. *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions* (Albany: SUNY Press,1993).
[32] Chapple, *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions*, 1993, 73.
[33] Shiva, *Earth Democracy Justice, Sustainability and Peace,* 2005*,* 116.
[34] Siva, Earth Democracy Justice, Sustainability and Peace, 2005, 116-117.
[35] Vasudha Narayanan, 'One Tree is Equal to Ten Sons: Hindu Responds to the Problems of Ecology, Population and Consumption', *Journal of American Academy of Religion*, 65, 1997.
[36] T. K. Oommen, 'Religion and Development in Hindu Society' *Social Compass*, 39.1, 1992, 67-75.

life—the stage of the forest dweller. This is entirely different to the most reclusive world-renouncing forest monks of modern Thailand having the largest popular cult following among Thai Buddhists.[37] Even though Indian religious organisations speak about the spiritual and physical benefit of yogic and devotional practices their approach to the protection of the environment seems unproductive in some places in India. A good example is, The Art of Living, which has centres all over the world and propagates yoga and meditation, recently organised a three-day cultural festival on the banks of river Yamuna. The event caused damage to the Yamuna floodplains and an expert committee of the National Green Tribunal reported that "the ground is now totally levelled, compacted and hardened and is totally devoid of water bodies or depressions and almost completely devoid of any vegetation.[38] After a scientific study the panel revealed that it would take at least 10 years to fix the damage.

The other major drawback of ashram and yogic approaches are in a situation where cultural nationalism is hijacking the Indian political scene. By adopting these approaches, it is not possible to gain the wider support from the people at the lowest strata of society because they do not acknowledge the sufferings of the poor or recognise them as environmental victims. As Northcott opines a collective attention of all citizens is necessary "to protect the fruitfulness of the earth; that means religious environmentalism necessitates a critical analysis for the "acknowledgement of ecological as well as and political duties of the nations to their own citizens and their own lands."[39] When considering a significant role for political commitment to care for nature, it is vital that religious environmentalism move pragmatically beyond the devotional and renouncer approach to nature if they are to change the moral climate of all citizens of India.

1.3.2 Cosmological Approaches to the Environment

In Indian religious traditions dharmic ecology explains a theocentric and sacred dimension of the cosmic common good. The divine exists in all beings, and all creatures exist because of the Supreme God, which means dharma dwells in the

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[37] Stanley Jayaraja Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets: A Study in Charisma, Hagiography, Sectarianism and Millennial Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
[38] http://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi-news/sri-sri-event-destroyed-yamuna-floodplains-restoration-will-cost-rs-13-cr-take-10-years-ngt-panel/story-F69BbXjhM9NOLYX1OVWtnI.html
[39] Northcott, *A Political Theology of Climate Change*, 49.

Supreme and it reveals the Ultimate divine, human, and the cosmos.[40] Exposing this cosmic vision Daniel P. Scheid says that there is a correlation between cosmic order and moral order, which connects divine presence in the cosmos aimed at social welfare, personal moral responsibility, and universal flourishing, and dharma signifies the well-being of the cosmos.[41] Hindu religion offers cosmological imagery which values the power of the natural world.

Indian religious scholars depict cosmological imageries from Vedic texts and rituals, which revere the earth (Bhumi), the atmosphere (Bhuvav), and sky (sva). There are gods and goddesses associated with earth, water, fire and wind through which Hindu scholars highlight the underlying ecological sensitivity within their religious tradition. The Panchamahabhuta (five great elements); earth (prthivi), water (jal), fire (tejas), air (vayu) and sky (akasa) are meditative and ritualistic cosmic elements of the daily worship of Hindu religion. Vedic tradition projects *Surya* (Sun) as a manifestation of the god *Agni* (fire). This tradition teaches that the Sun is the energy of the universe, including life energy and Agni is considered to be the water for the creation and maintenance of life. According to this tradition the day begins at sunrise with devotions to the Sun, when the Lord rises anew from the womb of Mother Earth.[42] Therefore the gesture of folded hands to the Sun god conveys the meaning of human beings receiving the Lord to the fountain of life. However, Vannucci says that Vedic man was not always kind to the forest as he used fire to burn it down to make room for agricultural and pasture lands.[43]

Among contemporary environmental writers and activists Shiva makes a notable contribution to religious environmental thoughts and actions in India. She introduces an eco-feminist perspective to explain cosmo-centric environmental principles and has done considerable work on women's significant contribution to the Chipko movement. She expounds the potentiality of native seed varieties in India and raises the voice of resistance to the 'monoculturalization' of the mind. Her popular work, *Staying alive: Women, Ecology and Development,* explains Indian environmental discourse based on the Indian sacred landscape. According to her,

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[40] Daniel P. Scheid, *The Cosmic Common Good: Religious Grounds for Ecological Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press,2016).
[41] Daniel P. Scheid, *The Cosmic Common Good: Religious Grounds for Ecological Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press,2016).
[42] Marta Vaccunci, 'Tradition and Change', *India International Centre Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No. 1/2, 1992, 26.
[43] Marta Vaccunci, 'Tradition and Change', *India International Centre Quarterly*, 27.

women in environmental movements in India make strong efforts to constitute a non-violent and humanly inclusive alternative to the dominant paradigm of contemporary scientific and developmental thought. The prime assumption of her work is that Hindu women have been and continue to be naturally and "culturally" ecological agents and she presents nature as a feminine principle based on the view of Indian cosmology.[44] She presents the Tulasi plant as an image of a goddess, because according to her, "the tulsi is sacred not merely as a plant with beneficial properties but as Brindavan, the symbol of the cosmos, and so in their daily watering and worship, women renew the relationship of the home with the cosmos and with the world process."[45]

Shiva interprets the sacred value of the cosmos with the image of the tulsi plant, a plant that is planted and worshiped in every Hindu home. In their daily watering and worship women renew the relationship of the home with the cosmos and with the world process.[46] Contrary to this presentation Nagarajan says that the *tulsi* plant may be the only plant that is conserved in the vicinity of the household, and the practice of worshiping it does not necessarily reflect on the conservation of the natural world outside the household.[47] I would argue, however, that reverence embedded ecologies are not intrinsically nature conservation oriented.

Shiva delineates nature as a creative expression of the feminine principle, both in ontological continuity with humans as well as above them. She says that ontologically, there is no divide between man and nature, or between man and woman, because life in all its forms arises from the feminine principle.[48] She argues that contemporary western views of nature are fraught with the dichotomy or duality between man and woman, and person and nature, but in Indian cosmology person and nature (Purusha-Prakriti) is a duality in unity, and are inseparable complements of one another in nature, in woman, in man. She says that "every form of creation bears the sign of this dialectical unity, of diversity within a unifying principle, and this dialectical harmony between the male and female principles and between nature and

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[44] Shiva, *Staying alive: Women, Ecology and Development,* 37.
[45] Shiva, *Staying alive: Women, Ecology and Development*, 38.
[46] Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women Ecology and Development,* 38-39.
[47] Viyaya Rettakudi Nagarajan, 'The Earth Goddess as Bhu Devi: Toward a Theory of Embedded Ecologies in Folk Hinduism' in Lance E. Nelson (ed) *Purifying the Earthly Body of God: Religion and Ecology in Hindu India* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1998. 269–96. Nagarajan Argues that "the assumption that attribution of sacrality to nature leads to ecological *behaviour* is highly problematic." P.283.
[48] Shiva, *Staying alive: Women, Ecology and Development,* 1989, 39.

man, becomes the basis of ecological thought and action in India."[49] For Shiva this understanding is an ontological shift towards an ecologically sustainable future with much to gain from the world-views of ancient civilisations and diverse cultures which survived sustainably for centuries. Her understanding is based on an ontology of the feminine as the living principle, and on an ontological continuity between society and nature - the humanisation of nature and the naturalisation of society.[50] She argues that the notion of the *purusha/prakrti* construct does not create ontological dualism between self and nature.[51] Rita DasGupta Sherma criticises Shiva's argument and says that, "Shiva's understanding of the interplay between the masculine and feminine principle is inaccurate from the classical Hindu Yoga- Vedanta perspective. Her interpretation is only viable from the standpoint of *Tantra*."[52] Moreover, all her arguments are rooted in her findings that Western intellectual colonisation is responsible for the failures to protect environmental values in India. In her opinion the root cause of environmental problems is the approach of the West toward Third World countries, and particularly the Third World's experience of colonisation, modernisation of technologies and economic development. Lance Nelson criticises this view, and argues that Shiva ignores the precolonial aspects of the problem and "tends to give idealised readings of the environmental implications of certain aspects of Hindu thought."[53]

Religious environmentalists use insights and references from their scripture to explain the ecological positions of their religious traditions. The Brhadaranyka Upanishad, one of the oldest Upanishads and one of the largest and important ones has been regularly quoted by Shiva and Jain. In modern days Sri Sankaracharya's commentary of the Brhadaranyka Upanishad is well regarded and taught widely. From an ecological point of view, several aspects of the formulation by Sri Sankaracharya's addition seems problematic. Arvind Sharma points out in detail

> (1) That Sankara's system does not in a way which could be considered eco-friendly; (2) that reverence for nature therefore remains an Advaitic non sequitur; that ultimate value in the system does not attach to things of the

[49] Shiva, *Staying alive: Women, Ecology and Development,*1989, 39.
[50] Shiva, *Staying alive: Women, Ecology and Development,* 1989, 40.
[51] Shiva, *Staying alive: Women, Ecology and Development,* 1989, 41.
[52]Rita DasGupta Sherma, 'Sacred Immanence', in Lance E. Nelson (ed), *Purifying the Earthly Body of God* (New York: State University Press of New York, 1998),105.
[53] Lance Nelson, 'The Dualism of Non-Dualism Advaita Vedanta and the Irrelevance of Nature' in Lance C. Nelson (ed), *Purifying the Earthly Body of God* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 82-83

> world, as per Brhadaranyka 2.4.5 ("Verily, not for the sake of all is all dear but all is dear for the sake of the Self."); (4) that Advaita's description of the universe as a world of appearance or maya and the description of maya as anirvacaniya (inexplicable) and tucha (insignificant) are far from helpful; (5) that the Advaitic doctrine of the incompatibility of action and knowledge militates against eco-activism; and (6) that Advaita's tradition of ascetic denial of the world does the same.[54]

Sharma remarks that in the Brhadaranyka all value is located in the Self alone. Similarly, Anil Agarwal holds his position that Hinduism is a highly individualistic religion and the primary concern of an individual is for the sake of their own well-being.[55] He understands this behaviour as anti-cosmological and the root cause of the environmental crisis. Agarwal maintains that the culture of self-centeredness, highly nurtured by primary concern, marks a failure in keeping environmental values in modern India.[56] He says that Hinduism's primary focus lies on the self, one's immediate family, and one's caste niche, to the neglect of the larger society and community.[57]

The Hindu religious approaches to the environment point out that explaining the relationship between human natural world toward care for nature has not been consistently proven in Indian religious environmental discussions. The ways in which the natural world is understood with the sacred concept are also problematic. In order to give strength to this argument the unsettled issues in the concept of nature and the danger in glorifying the myths in the past.

1.3.3. Unsettled Issues in the Concept of Sacred Nature

Environmental activists and writers venerate nature as sacred. Forests are considered to be sacred. Shiva claims that forests nurture an ecological civilization in the most fundamental sense of harmony with nature. She finds this relationship in the *Aranyakas* or forest texts of the Hindu scripture and in the everyday beliefs of tribal and peasant society.[58] According to her a sacred tree serves as an image of

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[54] Arvind Sharma, 'Attitude to Nature in the Early Upanisads', in Lance E. Nelson (ed), *Purifying the Eartly Body of God* (New York: State University of New York, 1998),57-58.
[55] Anil Agarwal, *Can Hindu Beliefs and Values Help India Meet Its Ecological Crisis?,* 2000, 172
[56] Agarwal, *Can Hindu Beliefs and Values Help India Meet Its Ecological Crisis?,* 2000, 172-173.
[57] Agarwal, *Can Hindu Beliefs and Values Help India Meet Its Ecological Crisis?,* 2000, 174.
[58] Shiva explains the forest as the highest expression of the earth's fertility and productivity is symbolised in yet another form as the Earth Mother as Vana Durga or the Tree Goddess in Bengal she is associated with the *sheora* tree (Tropbis *aspera),* and with the *sal (Shorea robusta)* and *asvathha (Ficus religiosa).* In Comilla she is Bamani, in Assam she is Rupeswari. In folk and tribal cultures especially, trees and forests are also worshipped as *Vana Devatas* or forest deities. Vandana Shiva, *Staying alive: Women, Ecology and Development,*53.

the cosmos and is a symbol of the inexhaustible source of cosmic fertility. Sacred forests and sacred groves were created and maintained throughout India as a cultural response for their protection.[59] India has approximately 13,720 sacred groves.[60] Pankaj Jain refers to the remarks made by Albertina Nugteren that although the sacred groves can greatly enrich and enhance the current ecological movements, the claims about the intrinsically green nature of Indic religious traditions can be exaggerated and can actually harm the effectiveness of environmentalism as a social movement.[61] In the past, in some parts of India there were religious practices linked with the preservation of different types of trees including medicinal and aromatic plants, and different animals.[62] It has a long history even before the Greek civilization, which contributed to the development of different forms of science.

From his in-depth study of the Bishnois community's approach to the environment, O. P. Dwivedi makes a powerful argument that environmental conservation is linked with religious duties. He reveals that the Bishnois community in the state of Rajasthan considers nature to be sacred as "they believe that cutting a tree, or killing an animal or bird is sacrilege."[63] He narrates their environmental pragmatic dimension environmentalism by telling a story regarding their religious life.[64] Although the Bishnios community followed Hinduism, their religious life was modified in connection with environmental values by Guru Maharaj Jambaji. Once the Guru witnessed a severe drought in the Marwar area and people cut down trees to feed their animals. The drought continued and all trees were cut down, followed by the death of all animals. Realising the facts that trees should be protected to sustain the life of all animals including human beings, he formulated twenty-nine injunctions. The supreme rule was a ban on the cutting of any green tree and killing of any animal or bird. Bishnios communities followed his injunctions strictly with religious perspective. About three hundred years after the introduction of these injunctions the King of Jodhpur sent his forces to this land to collect timber for the construction of his

[59]Shiva, *Staying alive: Women, Ecology and Development,* 1989, 54.
[60] Jain, *Dharma and Ecology of Hindu Communities*, 2011, 79.
[61] Jain, *Dharma and Ecology of Hindu Communities*, 2011, 79.
[62] J. Donald Hughes, 'Early Ecological knowledge of India from Alexander and Aristotle to Aelian' in Richard H. Grove et.al, *Nature and the Orient: The Environmental History of South and Southeast Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 70-86.
[63] O. P. Dwivedi, 'Dharmic Ecology', in Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker (eds), *Hinduism and Ecology* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000),16.
[64] Dwivedi, 'Dharmic Ecology', 2000, 16-17.

palace. A massive protest was instigated by women who encircled the trees with their bodies in order to protect them. Despite the fact that many were killed, more women came forward to lead and support the protest. When the king learnt of this human sacrifice, he called his forces back and extended his support to protect their beliefs. Dwivedi argues that the Chipko Movement is highly inspired by the religious dimension of Bishnios' approach to environmentalism.[65] He considers these two events to be the examples of practical impact of religion on environmental conservation. From his Hindu religious knowledge he says that, "so long as mother earth is able to sustain magnificent mountains, lush forests, streams and rivers, and related endowments, she will be able to nourish all, particularly the human race and its progeny."[66] The earth is religiously considered as life giver.

Forests nurtured an ecological civilisation in the most fundamental sense of harmony with nature.[67] Participation in the life of the forest is the central idea in the Aranyakas (Forest Texts). The forest as the expression of highest fertility is symbolised as Vana Durga (Forest Goddess).[68] Sacred forests were created and maintained all over India as a cultural expression of protecting life. Shiva portrays an image of a sacred grove,

> A natural system of conservancy was in vogue; almost every hill-top is dedicated to some local deity and the trees on or about the spot are regarded with great respect so that nobody dares to touch them. There is also a general impression among the people that everyone cutting a tree should plant another in its place.[69]

Shiva believes that systematic knowledge about plants and forests was formulated from the ancient traditions which conveyed that human survival is linked to the existence of forests.[70] Indigenous science did not perceive trees as just wood, instead they were looked at from a multi-functional point of view, with a focus on diversity of form and function.[71] She argues that "the separation of life-giving and life-maintaining functions of the forest from its commercial value has thus led to the

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[65] Dwivedi, 'Dharmic Ecology', 2000, 17.
[66] Dwivedi, 'Dharmic Ecology', 2000, 18
[67] Vandana Shiva, 'Women in Forest', in George E. James (ed), *Ethical Perspectives on Environmental Issues in India* (New Delhi: A.P.H Publishing Company,1999).74.
[68] Shiva, 'Women in Forest', 1999, 74.
[69] Shiva, 'Women in Forest', 1999, 75.
[70] Shiva believes that in ancient Indian traditions, scientific knowledge of the plant kingdom from the terms like vrikshayurveda, which means the science of the treatment of pant diseases, and vanaspathy vidya or plant science. Vandana Shiva, 'Women in Forest', 1999, 76.
[71] Shiva, 'Women in Forest', 1999, 76.

destruction of the essential ecological process to which forests and trees contribute".[72]

Most religious environmental writers in India represent environmental concerns from their scriptures in order to raise awareness regarding the environment among the general public. Narayana says that in understanding the ecological crisis, Hindu communities have started to lead environmental practices by drawing from *dharmic* texts, and using epics and *Puranas* as inspiration in planting gardens by reviving customary lore on the medicinal importance of trees and plants.[73] Pankaj Jain says that nature worship is found in various texts and manifests itself in practical dimensions.[74] He believes that reverence to nature and the practice of restoration, protection and conservation are equally important in Indian religious environmentalism. Mary McGee says that the Arthasastra texts provide a list of flora and fauna indigenous to the area at a particular time. She argues that, "such catalogues may provide critical evidence about the biological diversity that was present in earlier times, but they also provide practical knowledge that can be used to reintroduce diversity into a particular environment."[75] She draws our attention to the comments made by Frank Korom on "Hinduism and Ecology" who at the Harvard conference raised serious questions about the trustworthiness of texts in providing accurate knowledge about regional biodiversity, since many texts are copied verbatim from generation to generation and region to region. Therefore he questions its trustworthiness and urges caution when using it as a reference to make claims.[76] Inconsistent ways of demonstrating religious environmentalism cannot have a meaningful impact on people.

Meera Roy uses one of the early Indian compositions Valmiki's Ramayana, composed between 2nd Century BC to 2nd Century AD, to show its strong overtones regarding the supremacy of nature and to explain ecological values.[77] David Lee says that the Valmiki Ramayana helps us to understand traditions that may have

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[72] Shiva, 'Women in Forest', 1999, 104.
[73] Vasuda Narayanan, 'One Tree Is Equal to Ten Sons: Hindu Response to the Problems of Ecology, Population, and Consumption', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65 (1997), 321.
[74] Jain, *Dharma and Ecology of Hindu Communities*, 2011, 112.
[75] Mary McGee, 'State responsibility for Environment Management', in Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker (ed), *Hinduism and Ecology* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000),76.
[76] Mary McGee, 'State responsibility for Environment Management', 2000, 76.
[77] Meera Roy, 'Environment and Ecology in the Ramayana', *Indian Journal of History of Science*, (2005),1

contributed to contemporary attitudes toward nature.[78] According to him it reflects a love of the forest which provides much of value to society, including edible, medicinal, and sacred plants.[79] Lee argues that the Ramayana stresses the sacredness of forests in two ways; first – as the magical place for the pursuit of spiritual perfection, and second – the story of Ramayana itself has made many – and the forests of these places – sacred.[80] Meera Roy's investigation on "*Environment and Ecology in Ramayana*" narrates a creative reverence to the forests and points out that "biodiversity, water element, etc., are left untold."[81] Although there are scriptural references about nature, Swarnalatha Rangarajan's conversation with Paula Richman regarding the "Ecological Dimension of the Ramayana" explains poetically about the divine locations of forests and its dwellers, but at the same time it cannot move beyond the realities of the contemporary issues.[82]

Shiva, Arawal, Jain and Banwari draw upon Brahminical Hinduism to explain the sacred images of the natural wold. Although forests are considered to be sacred, the reality at present is that the pilgrim centres have a tendency to encroach upon forest land and pollute the environment in different ways. Kiran E. Shinde's study on religious tourist destinations in India reveals that religious tourism ecologically affects the pilgrim centres located in the forests and generally the revenue generated drives rapid demographic change and land use.[83] From his extensive case studies he argues that the past few decades reflect new pressures on the environment of the sacred site.[84] The sacred sites in India accord a low priority in caring for the environment. In the words of Myra Shackley, a low priority for environmental concerns in sacred locations are due to the belief that the deities associated with the particular sites will take care of all the problems.[85] Kiran Shinde identifies the lack of stakeholders such as religious institutions in environmental management especially

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[78] David Lee, 'Natural History of the Ramayana', in Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Hinduism and Ecology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).261.
[79] Lee, 'Natural History of the Ramayana', 2000, 262.
[80] Lee, 'Natural History of the Ramayana', 2000, 258.
[81] Meera Roy, 'Environment and Ecology in the Ramayana', 2005, 21.
[82] Swarnalatha Rangarajan, 'Ecological Dimensions of the Ramayana: A Conversation with Paula Richman', *The Trumpeter*, 25 (2009), 22-33.
[83] Kiran A. Shinde, 'Planning for Urbanisation in Religious Tourism Destinations: Insights from Shirdi, India', *Planning Practice and Research*, 32, 1 (2017), 151.
[84] Kiran A. Shinde, 'Pilgrimage and the Environment: Challenges in a Pilgrimage Centre', 2017, 343-365.
[85] Myra Shackley, *Managing Sacred Sites: Service Provision and Visitor Experience* (London: Continuum, 2001).

connected to the sacred sites, arguing that the Hindu religious institutions pay little attention to environmental activism.

Another major crisis of the Hindu religious environmentalism is that their ecological discussions ignore the diversity of other religious traditions including tribal and Adivasi traditions. Insights into indigenous cultures are vital to the understanding and promotion of sustainable living. M. Adebisi Sowunmi opines that "indigenous people have an excellent knowledge of their environment, not over-exploiting its wide range of resources. Several are known to use more than a hundred different plant species for dietary, medicinal and other domestic purposes. A sign of their harmonious existence with the environment and judicious exploitation of it is that they can remain for generations, over thousands of years, in the same area."[86] Northcott gives attention to indigenous communities to draw environmental virtues from them in order to substantiate religious environmental discourses. He observes the deep sense of ecological consciousness that indigenous communities have for the relationality of human life, their ecosystems and parts of the biosphere. He also finds that their ecosystem place fosters the virtues of justice, compassion, care and respect for life of all living and non-living beings.[87] I would argue that in order to maintain a robust religious environmentalism, the wide range of ecological practices of the indigenous communities have a significant role to play in the understanding of the caring and sustaining relationship required between all living and non-living beings.

1.3.4. 'Glorified' Myths and the Question of Sacred Nature

Environmentalism in India has a history of using religious myths as a means to raise ecological awareness. Marta Vannuci opines that the essence of Indian tradition is to live in partnership with nature. According to her the worship of the Earth Mother can be traced back to primeval beginnings in India.[88] By reading the Atharva Veda, Eric J. Lott highlights this concept of Mother Earth seen in Hindu theological insights for theological discussion. From his reading he says that, "if our image of the universe is that of the divine body, it can so easily also been seen as a

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[86] M. Adebisi Sowunmi, 'Giver of Life – Sustain Your Creation', in David G. Hallman (ed), *Ecotheology Voices From South and North* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994).153.
[87] Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, 1996, 122 – 123.
[88] Marta Vannucci, 'Tradition and Change', in Geeti Sen (ed), *Indigenous Vision: Peoples of India Attitudes to the Environment* (New Delhi, India International Centre, 1992), 25

sacred mother, one who sustains and nourishes, one whose dependent children we are."[89] Vannucci observes that rituals are interracially connected with human commitment to the reverence for nature. In the words of Vannucci,

> "Man's urge to participate in the cosmic drama is expressed daily through gestures: by offering water with folded hands to the Sun god, by kindling the sacred fire, by attrition of the two *aranis*, or lighting the home fire, by pouring ghee on the fire, by fumigating the home, by pouring water at the foot of trees, by ritual bathing in the rivers, by the conservation of sacred groves, by garlanding of domestic animals – in fact, by all acts of daily life that becomes rituals in that they associate man with nature."[90]

According to Jain, in past centuries Indian communities, like other traditional communities, did not have an understanding of "the environment" as separate from the other spheres of activity in their lives. His case studies of rural Hindu communities, the Bishnois, Bhils, and Swadhyaya show that these communities have maintained strong communal practices to protect local ecosystems such as forests and water sources. He believes that these communities carry out their pragmatic commitment not as environmental acts but rather as expressions of dharma. He finds that their ritual motivates them to protect animals and trees, to build *Vrikshamandiras* (tree temples) and to maintain *Nirmal Nirs* (water harvesting sites). It is his claim that these traditional Indian groups do not see religion, ecology, and ethics as separate arenas of life. Instead, they understand it to be part of their dharma to treat creation with respect. Jain opines that traditional communities focus on their daily way of life, and not ecological discourse. [91] Therefore he argues that it is only by the dharmic practices rooted in their traditions that they can help to save the biodiversity.

Creation of myths of a glorious past is a feature of such explanations, and through which land, rivers, hills are being explained with the images of fertility and peaceful regions.[92] The river Ganga is considered as a holy mother and a symbol of national unity and cultural solidarity. Sundarlal Bahuguna, an environmental activist who protested against the Tehri Dam Project, commends that Ganga is not only a holy river, but is most important for national integrity, cultural unity, and the oneness

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[89] Eric J. Lott, *Indian Culture and Earth Care* (Bangalore, Indian Institute of World Culture,1986), 11
[90] Marta Vannucci, 'Tradition and Change' in Geeti Sen (ed), *Indigenous Vision: Peoples of India Attitudes to the Environment* (New Delhi, India International Centre, 1992), 26
[91] Jain, *Dharma and Ecology of Hindu Communities*, 2011, 14.
[92] Mukul Sharma, 'Passages from Nature to Nationalism: Sundarlal Bahuguna and Tehri Dam Opposition in Garhwal', *Economic and Political Weekly,* 44 (2009, 35-42.

of India.[93] But at the same time Mukul Sharma argues that Ganga, the holy river of the Hindus, plays a key role in environmental politics in India, and in the creation of a national identity. According to him this holy river is a "myth – an assemblage of religious faiths and beliefs, ideologically laden signs and images…..(is) great, immortal and symbols of devotion, closely interwoven with the culture and civilization prescribed in the Hindu scripture… In the movement, environmentalists and religious leaders, go for a culturally imaginative representation of Ganga….which often get Hinduised and become a part of environmental politics and identity."[94] Sharma narrates the later part of the environmental movement Sundarlal Bahuguna that, gradually towards the end of the protest, the movement created a conservative Hindu imagery, which led them to have a close association with Hindutva politics. Along with RSS and VHP, this movement organized a joint campaign, which according to Sharma, was "a mixture of Hindu faith and emotion, mythical belief and metaphors, concerns of national unity, constructions of a glorious past and a threatened present, culminating in a clarion call to Hindus."[95] For Hindu political leaders Ganga is not a river, it is a deity. The damming of the holy river is destroying the soul of Indians. Sharma refers to Shivaji Rao, who believes that many Indians want to use this holy divine Ganga for their material purposes, and exploit it by diverting its holy water for irrigation and hydro-power generation. "Since the holy river is the only sacred symbol of our culture and national integrity, we have to protect it."[96] The protest movements move under a religious umbrella which has been conveniently politicalised with Hindu nationalism. In the words of Sharma, its protest anchored in a continuous medium of Hindu, aggressive, nationalist meaning.[97] This combined protest has become an attempt to encompass sacredness with impulse, gravity of high politics with the solemnity of daily worship, and nature with nationalism.[98]

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[93] Sharma, 'Passages from Nature to Nationalism: Sundarlal Bahuguna and Tehri Dam Opposition in Garhwal', 38.
[94] Sharma, 'Passages from Nature to Nationalism: Sundarlal Bahuguna and Tehri Dam Opposition in Garhwal', 38.
[95] Sharma, 'Passages from Nature to Nationalism: Sundarlal Bahuguna and Tehri Dam Opposition in Garhwal', 40.
[96] Sharma, 'Passages from Nature to Nationalism: Sundarlal Bahuguna and Tehri Dam Opposition in Garhwal', 40.
[97] Sharma, 'Passages from Nature to Nationalism: Sundarlal Bahuguna and Tehri Dam Opposition in Garhwal', 41.
[98] Sharma, 'Passages from Nature to Nationalism: Sundarlal Bahuguna and Tehri Dam Opposition in Garhwal', 35-42.

One of the prominent leaders of the BJP claimed that, “the BJP is really the chosen instrument of the divine to take our country out of its present problems and to lofty heights of all round achievement.”[99] The rise of the Hindu Right prompted a fresh wave of gloomy forebodings about the future of India.[100] But the ultimate aim of the Hindutva nationalist agenda is to construct a monolithic culture firmly grounded in hierarchical ideology.[101]Nanda argues that traditional Hinduism itself is a construct, and neo-Hinduism is also a special construct which satisfies the nationalistic pride in India’s Hindu heritage, and it does not have any hold on civil societies.[102] Thomas Derr strongly argues that the religious regard for nature did not prevent its ruthless exploitation in the country where ancient Hindu environmental ideologies are highly expressed.[103]

Hindu scholar Krishnakant Shukla argued that the Ganges' unique place in Hindu cosmology means the river will remain at the heart of Hindu life - however severe the pressures of modern life may become. Myth lives on in Varanasi, Krishnakant said. "Due to some inexplicable miracle, you can still find people here doing their daily practices the way they did one thousand years ago," he said. "This is amazing - I really don't think there is any other place in the world."[104] Edward Luce strongly believes that retreating to the past is not a solution.[105] Kelly Alley’s detailed study on sacred approach to rivers reveals that the river Ganga is a sacred river, which is highly polluted, but for the Hindu devotees Ganga is a purifying goddess free from pollution. Although there are dichotomies in their approaches toward purification of human life and river, Alley observes that ablution and worship continues by considering that the integrity of Ganga’s sacred purity is protected. In her words, “pandas (pilgrim priests) make sacred purity a much more complicated issue because they use this conviction to support their occupational activities. The belief in sacred purity in this case makes acceptance of immoral or corrupt behaviour

[99] Shiva, *Earth Democracy*, 2005, 119.
[100] Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi* (London: Macmillan, 2007), 658.
[101] Pamela Shurmer Smith, *India Globalization and Change* (London: Arnold, 2000), 124.
[102] Meera Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward: Postmodern Critiques of Science and Hindu Nationalism in India* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 47.
[103] Thomas S. Derr, 'Religions Responsibility for the Ecological Crisis: An Argument Run Amok', *World View* 18 (1975), 43.
[104] http://www.dw.com/en/indias-polluted-ganges-river-threatens-peoples-livelihoods/a-17237276
[105] Edward Luce, *In Spite of the Gods: The Strange Rise of Modern India* (London: Abacus, 2006), 349.

possible even when that very behaviour is denounced."[106] Although glorifying the myths of the Hindu past and its connection with nature is remembered through different religious practices connected with nature, in modern days all of them are silent in addressing the distress of the mother earth.

1.4 The Indian Secular Approach to Environment

Moving beyond the religious environmental discussions Meera Nanda prioritises secular concerns in ecological concerns. Nanda suspiciously poses the pertinent issue about the relationship between religious environmentalism and environmentalism of the poor, which are rarely discussed in Indian religious environmentalism. Nanda's critical perspective strongly challenges the current religious-nationalistic scenario in which the present government is using religious concepts for cultural nationalism. She does not agree with religious attempts to address social and political issues in India and wants to keep the nation free from Hindu nationalistic agendas and to project secular ideologies. She maintains that while Hindu nationalism does not reject the modern ideas of secularism and democracy, she believes it aggressively restates them in a Hindu civilizational idiom.[107] She strongly criticizes their approach toward science stating that when Hindu nationalists use the modern word "secular," they mean the traditional hierarchical tolerance of the relativity of truths that prevailed in a caste society. She says that "when they use the word 'science' they mean an enchanted, supernatural science, based upon the idealistic metaphysics of classical Hinduism that treats the divine as constitutive of all of nature."[108] She argues strongly that Hindu dharma subverts the task of creating a secular and humanistic world view which can support the values of tolerance and plural democracy.[109] Her discussion regarding secularism is not an argument for the elimination of religion, but for keeping transparency and honesty in religiously approaching environmental problems. According to her, religion is vitally important for modern societies, and it can be used

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[106] Kelly D. Alley, 'Idioms of Degeneracy: Assessing Ganga's Purity', in Lance E. Nelson (ed), *Purifying the Earthly Body of God: Religion and Ecology in India* (New York: State University of New York Press, Albany, 1998), 323.
[107] Meera Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward: Postmodern Critiques of Science and Hindu Nationalism in India* (London, Rutgers University Press, 2003), 38
[108] Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward: Postmodern Critiques of Science and Hindu Nationalism in India*, 2003, 38
[109] Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward: Postmodern Critiques of Science and Hindu Nationalism in India*, 2003, 38

as a constant and critical engagement.[110] Similarly, Sharma argues that there are emotional tendencies behind the attempts to link green ideologies with Hindu rights, and such attempts create conservatism rather than nature conservation.[111] I argue that religious environmentalism in India is essential and that constant and critical engagement is required in order to achieve a sustainable society.

Nanda says that a secular, promethean environmentalism is more in keeping with the aspirations of the poor in India. Meera Nanda analyses environmental problems from the view point of the poor. She calls for secular motivation for environmental action committed to the voice of the poor and environmental conservation. According to her, rather than drape the cloak of sacredness around nature, environmentalism in India should become a source of secularism and a class-based collective action.[112] Meera Nanda criticizes the joint venture of secular Indian government and India's corporate sector towards their support to Hinduism by promoting education and tourism. She says that as a step to promote tourism and education land is gifted or sold at a highly discounted rate to temples or religious endowments for different projects.[113] She highlights the permission given to the Akshardham temple on the banks of Yamuna River in Delhi, which was carried out by flouting all norms, rules and laws and ignored ecological concerns. This land distribution continues even now whilst millions of landless poor people seek shelter.

Nanda claims, with the support of examples, that in India religious rituals and ideologies have been tapped for their potential for mobilisation on behalf of the environment. According to her “examples range from women tying rachis to trees, mass recitations of Bhagwat Purana at the site of Chipko, fasts, religious vows on the river banks and temples, invocations of Krishna as the lord of cows and pastures, invocations of shakti, devi, bhu mata (or Narmada mata, or Ganga mata), karma, reincarnation, sacred trees, rivers, and even jati, reinterpreted as biological species living in harmony with their environment. All major environmental campaigns in recent years, including Chipko, Narmada Bachao Andolan, and even to some extent,

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[110] Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward: Postmodern Critiques of Science and Hindu Nationalism in India*, 44

[111] Mukul Sharma, “Passages from Nature to Nationalism: Sundarlal Bahuguna and Tehri Dam Opposition in Garhwal”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 44. 8, (2009), 35-42.

[112] Meera Nanda, *Dharmic Ecology and the Neo-Pagan International: The Dangers of Religious Environmentalism in India*, (2004).

[113] Meera Nanda, *The God Market: How Globalisation Is Making India More Hindu* (Delhi: Random House India, 2009).

the controversy over GM seeds, have had their share of religious imagery, mixed in with the nostalgic invocations of the good old days."[114] While a potential role of religions are considered for making sustainable communities, she finds it difficult to understand how religious environmentalism is able to offer environmentally sustainable living for the poor. I would argue that any attempt to articulate an adequate Indian religious environmental debate and discourse must start by listening to the positive ideas and responses of other religions to environmental issues based on the experience of the victims of environmental crisis.

Arundhati Roy represents the voice of the Indian people who are socially excluded and suffering due to the deliberate destruction of their life-sustaining environment in the name of 'Development'.[115] She warns about the nature of progress and development in the emerging global superpower scenario and reveals the dangerous faces of the environment and the poor people (victims).[116] She portrays images of people who are the most affected group in India; "they are people who, even after sixty years of India's so-called Independence, have no access to education, health care or legal redress. They are people who have been mercilessly exploited for decades, consistently cheated by small business men and money lenders, and the women raped as a matter of right by police and forest department personnel."[117] India, one of the strongest democratic nations in the world, grabs the rights of the poor in displaced locations and hands it over to the rich. The cultural and ecological landscape of the Adivasis and the Dalits in such displaced areas are redesigned according to the needs of the rich in the cities.[118] It is her opinion that, "India's poorest people are subsidizing the lifestyle of her richest."[119] Roy's approach presents a combative model of ecological activism, which acknowledges the concerns

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[114] Meera Nanda, *Dharmic Ecology and the Neo-Pagan International: The Dangers of Religious Environmentalism in India*, Paper presented at the 18th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies Lunds University, Sweden, July 8, 2004, at http://www.sacw.net/ DC/Communalism Collection/ArticlesArchive/072004_D_Ecology_MeeraNanda.pdf

[115] Arundathi Roy, *Walking with the Comrades* (London: Penguin Books, 2011.

[116] Roy, *Walking with the Comrades,* 2011, 211-215.

[117] Roy, *Walking with the Comrades,* 2011, 7.

[118] Roy attacks the big dam projects due to its feature of devastating the ecology of the entire river basin. Narmada Valley Development project is a big one India which will affect the lives of 25 million people who live in the valley, and it will submerge and destroy 4,000 square kilometres of natural deciduous forest. Arundathi Roy, *The Cost of Living,* (London: Flamingo, 1999), 33. Roy says that big dam projects and irrigation systems destroy traditional systems in the villages which were managed by the village communities for thousands of years, and took away their traditional wisdom. Arundathi Roy, *The Cost of Living*, (London: Flamingo, 1999), 13-15.

[119]Roy, *Walking with the Comrades*, 2011, 21.

of the poor and displaced. In her discussions in the public sphere she places the reality of struggle for existence as a political and social issue. Therefore it is necessary to ask whether Indian religious resources fully understand the realities of the poor who are the most vulnerable of the environmental crisis and should be willing to listen to the voice of environmentalism 'from below.'

1.5 Christian Approach to Environment

Christian engagement with environmentalism has become a major missional and theological concern of the churches in India. Inspired by Western theologians, Christianity in India began to introduce the ecological vision in mission through theological institutions. About three decades ago Eric J. Lott, a theology teacher at the United Theological College Bangalore, pointed out with a prophetic vision, the ecological mission of the Indian church. He travelled extensively in North and South India, giving bible studies and sermons in which he made the connections between the Christian tradition and environmental challenges in India. He commented that,

> It is, in fact, difficult not to be a pessimistic prophet of doom when describing our present ecological conditions. Perhaps those who have prophesied recently that much of South India will soon become a Thar-like desert, unless great policy changes are made, are unduly gloomy, the increasing desertification of large parts of India is, however, an undeniable fact. Indeed what makes a 'prophetic' stance the more necessary is that it is usually the rural and urban poor who suffer most as a result of the increasingly alarming destruction of the environment, i.e. of the human habitat.[120]

Since Lott wrote these words, Indian theologians, and most notably K. C. Abraham, Ken Gnanaken and Samuel Rayan, have produced extensive work on eco-theology as a manifestation of theological and missiological discourses of the Indian church for the preservation of planet earth.[121] Though coming from different ecclesiastical traditions – including the Catholic and the Church of South India - all three shared a theological approach namely that of liberation theology. However I will argue that the extensive use of liberation methodologies in formulating ecotheology in India ignored

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[120] Eric J. Lott, 'The Ecological Crisis and the Pastoral Ministry', *Masihi Sevak A Journal on Christian Ministry* XI, (1985),6.

[121] K. C. Abraham, *Liberative Solidarity: Contemporary Perspective on Mission*, (Thiruvalla, CSS, 1996); Ken Gnanakan, *Responsible Stewardship of God's Creation* (New York: WEA, 2014); Ken Gnanakan, *Kingdom Concerns: A Biblical Exploration Towards A Theology of Mission* (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 1989).

an already existing sacred tradition in engaging with Indian environmental locations, and in particular an indigenous Indian conception of nature as sacred.

1.5.1. Indian Christian Theological Search Toward a Scared Cosmic Tradition

Indian Christianity tries to maintain creative harmonious interreligious interaction in its theologising attempts and Indian Christian hermeneutical engagements make considerable efforts to manifest the Christian gospel in a multi-religious context.[122] Jacob Kavunkal opines that, "Indian Christian theology is rooted in Indian epistemology, which understands the meaning of a thing by relating it with others. Meaning is derived from the relationship, by reaching out and identifying with others."[123] Therefore Indian Christians are significantly open to religious pluralism by considering realities from their experience that commitment to one's faith implies respect for other religions in order to create and sustain better interrelationship.[124] In the words of Michael Amaladoss,

Our experience is that we see God active in the hearts and in the communities of other believers. We know that God relates to us in a particular manner through our religion, its myths, narratives and rituals. We know that God is relating to others too, not only without the mediation of these myths, narratives and rituals, but through other myths, narratives and rituals.[125]

Indian Christians affirm the richness of diversity, which is rooted in the faith in the character of divine mystery.[126] Through this understanding of divine mystery, Indian Christians find an alternate way of living in a pluralistic context by seeing people of other faiths – their stories, myths, and narratives as part of the divine plan and

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[122] M. M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance* (London: SCM Press, 1970); Israel Selvanayagam, *Relating to People of Other Faiths* (Tiruvalla: CSS, 2004), Jacob Kavunkal, *Anthropophany: Mission as Making New Humanity* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2008); Raymond Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany* (Mayknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1981); J. Russell Chandran, 'Methods and Ways of Doing Theology' in R. S. Sugirtharajah and Cecil Hargreaves (eds) *Readings in Indian Christian Theology 1,* 1993, 4-13; Kalarikkal Poulose Aleaz, *The Gospel of Indian Culture* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1994).

[123] Jacob Kavunkal, '*Theology of Religions from an Indian Perspective', Verbum SVD*, 51, (2010),155. In order to strengthen his opinion, he reveals his understanding that being and non-being are the characteristics of the Ultimate Reality. "Sat (being) and asat (non-being) are the qualities of the unknowable Brahman. Reality cannot be conceived in terms of either-or but both-and. In this framework Indian Christian cannot be indifferent to the followers of other religions, and even less negate their religious value.".155

[124] Jacob Kavunkal, 'The Mystery of God in and through Hinduism', in Sebastian Kim (ed), *Christian Theology in Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 22-40.

[125] Michael Amaladoss, *Making Harmony: Living in a Pluralistic World* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2003), 124

[126] Felix Wilfred, *On the Banks of the Ganges: Doing Contextual Theology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2002), 17-172.

revelation to direct all religious adherents toward praxis centred dimensions.[127] Therefore Indian Christianity adopts stories, myths, and ideologies to explain environmental commitments of the church in a secular context.

Rayan evolves a theology based on the unity of the human, the cosmic, and the divine. He explains that without nature humankind is nothing; without humankind nature is nothing; without both of these there are no tools, and without tools neither humankind nor nature is in their essential interactionary process by which we build and achieve ourselves and one another with the whole cosmic reality.[128] Panikkar suggests a Cosmotheandric principle to explain human commitment to the environment. It explains the interwoven relationship of God-World-Human beings. It is based on the understanding that "the divine, human and the earthly— however we may prefer to call them— are the three irreducible dimensions which constitute the real."[129] It implies interdependence, interconnectedness and interdependence of all the living and non-living beings in the universe are to be brought to daily life and worship in order to sustain the relational nature of the universe.

K.C. Abraham says that we should develop a new sense of interdependence and affirm that we belong to the earth, and that we share a common destiny with the earth.[130] His main concern is to draw religious attention toward a new sense of interdependence. He envisages a praxis centred vision of human wholeness which includes not only human relationship with one another, but also the human relationship with nature and the universe.[131] He sees this interconnectedness in the struggle of the marginalised groups which reflects the renewal of society and the renewal of the earth.[132] He boldly points out that the ecological crisis is the crisis of the poor. Although he agrees with the scientific data regarding the causes of ecological crisis, K. C. Abraham affirms that, "Related to these are problems of rapidly increasing population, spread of malnutrition and hunger, the subordination of women's and children's needs to men's needs, the ravages of war, the scandal of

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[127] Kavunkal, *Theology of Religions from an Indian Perspective, 2010,* 162-163.
[128] Samuel Rayan, 'Theological Perspectives on the Environmental Crisis, Religion and Society, 37 2 (1990), 18-34.
[129] Raimon Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1993), 60.
[130] K. C. Abraham, 'A Theological Response to Ecological Crisis', in David G. Hallman (ed), *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994), 69.
[131] Abraham, *Eco-Justice*, 23-27.
[132] Abraham, *Liberative Solidarity: Contemporary Perspective on Mission*, 112.

chronic poverty and wasteful affluence."[133] He calls for a practical Indian Christian theology but maintains that any theologising attempts must take into account the environmental experience of the poor and the most affected environmental victims. However, he ignores the notion of sacred as embedded in the subaltern communities whose rituals and practices persuade and promote the conservation of nature.

While Indian Christian theologians have discussed eco-theology extensively by referring to the approach of other religions to ecological traditions, my research indicates that they have not given enough attention to indigenous influences on Christian beliefs and practices concerning ecological sustainability.[134] Moreover, it is understood that modern Indian Christian theologians articulate cosmic metaphors – such as Raymond Pannikar's 'cosmic theandrism' – which are based on the concepts of other religious traditions, and it must be noted that such faith traditions consider nature the sacred and ignore the environmentalism of the poor and the victims of environment. This inconsistency is visible when Indian religious tradition and environment is properly analysed.

1.5.2. The Question of the Poor in Indian Religious Environmentalism

Religious environmental discourse in India has not fully concentrated on the poor but we found in our own research that it was a major focus of Indian Christian environmentalism. Dwivedi points out the major environmental problems are linked with Indian industrial development. Encroachment of common land and forest land, felling of trees for commercial purposes, minimal or no pollution abatement for heavy industries, unplanned urbanisation, displacement of the poor due to large scale projects such as dams and mines, and severe pesticide pollution and the extinction of species.[135] Indigenous people living in the forests, and on marginal lands such as those occupied by squatter settlements, are most severely impacted by these kinds of development but they are usually in India considered 'low caste' and hence their concerns are not influential in the social and political realm. The voice of the poor who suffer most from environmental problems gives rise to what Juan Martinez-Alier has called the 'environmentalism of the poor' which in the Indian Christian context

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[133] Abraham, *Liberative Solidarity: Contemporary Perspective on Mission*, 113.
[134] Raymond Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany* (Mayknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1981).
[135] O. P. Dwivedi, *India's Environmental Policies, Programmes, and stewardship* (New York: St. Martines Press, 1997), 22-23.

translates into a concern for environmental justice or 'ecojustice'.[136] The environmental issues are interconnected and together constitute an increasingly deteriorating environment and rapid depletion of natural resources.[137] He observes that in India the mounting pressure of population, high speed urbanisation, and increase of poverty also lead to an unsustainable approach to nature.[138] However, the most vulnerable of this crisis are not recognised by the majority of religious environmental thinkers in India. K. C. Abraham, an Indian Christian theologian, reminds us that environmental issues place a heavy burden on marginalised communities who live in and around the villages. He presents a statement issued by an Indian conference on ecology and development; "While all are affected by the ecological crisis, the life of the poor and marginalised is further impoverished by it. Shortage of fuel and water adds particular burdens to the life of women. It is said that the tribals are made environmental prisoners in their own land. Dalits, whose life has been subjected to social cultural oppression for generations, are facing new threats by the wanton destruction of natural environment."[139]

The Indian reality today is that a majority of the poor are landless or living in squatter settlement areas where they do not have formal 'title' such as the sides of rivers or on the edge of industrial sites, and government development strategies help only the rich. In order to enhance and expand their own comfortable life, the rich continue to destroy whatever is left for the poor: their villages, their forests, their people.[140] K. C. Abraham maintains that the opposition of the poor to big dam building is not aimed at preserving their habitat but is an attempt to protect the ecosystem of their geographical location from destructive powers.[141] Eric J. Lott portrays the victims of the environmental crisis by saying,

> It is the poor who suffer most from the increasing water-shortage, the increasing pollution of water, earth food and air, who suffer most from flooding

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[136] Joan Martinez-Alier, *The Environmentalism of the Poor: A Study of Ecological Conflicts and Valuation* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publications, 2002); K. C. Abraham, 'A Theological Response to the Ecological Crisis', in David G. Hallman, *Ecotheology Voices From South and North* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994).
[137] O. P. Dwivedi, 'Dharmic Ecology', in Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker (eds), *Hinduism and Ecology* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), 3.
[138] Dwivedi, 'Dharmic Ecology', 2000, 16
[139] Quoted in K. C. Abraham, 'A Theological Response to the Ecological Crisis', in David G. Hallman (ed), *Ecotheology Voices From South and North* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 62.
[140] K. C. Abraham, 'A Theological Response to the Ecological Crisis', in David G. Hallman (ed), *Ecotheology Voices From South and North* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 63 62.
[141] K. C. Abraham, 'A Theological Response to the Ecological Crisis', 1994, 63.

> and from lack of bio-mass resources for fuel, fodder, simple building-materials, and so on. In the end, of course, there will be disaster for everyone unless there is drastic change."[142]

Tomalin argues that religious attitudes of sacredness and reverence toward nature might be re-directed towards the 'wise use of nature' in the context of modern environmentalist initiatives. Thus, the poor might participate in environmental movements because it will benefit them materially.[143]

Like Roy, K. C. Abraham looks at the environmental problem from a human centred perspective. His approach is closely connected to justice and liberation of humanity in the Asian context. The critique of Liberation theology is that it does not touch on the subject of hope from an eco-justice perspective.[144] Jurgen Moltmann succinctly makes his position clear on issues of justice in this statement: "We shall not be able to achieve social justice without justice for the natural environment; we shall not be able to achieve justice for nature without social justice."[145] I argue that any approach to religious environmentalism must be praxis centred and be fully committed to the concerns of justice for the poor and marginalised in Indian society.

B. R. Ambedkar, an Indian jurist, economist, politician and social reformer and father of the Indian Constitution who fought for Dalit liberation, used the concept of sacred in explaining an Indian approach to social justice. He claims that all living and non-living beings on earth are sacred and the profane things are the elements which stand upon injustice.[146] He redefined the concept of sacred based on justice and equality. Ambedkar challenged the Brahminic notion of sacred which was culturally used to marginalise the Dalits and Tribal communities. Nirmal Minz and Sibasis Jana claim that the Dalit and Tribal traditions in India are friendly with nature and reveal a stewarding responsibility to care for nature.[147] The Brahminic notion of the sacred discourse, which is expressed by themselves as 'from above' excludes the traditions

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[142] Eric J. Lott, 'The Ecological Crisis and the Pastoral Ministry', *Masihi Sevak A Journal on Christian Ministry,* XI (1985), 4-6.
[143] Tomalin, *Biodivinity and Biodiversity*: *The Limits to Religious Environmentalism*, 2009, 172.
[144] George Mathew Nalunnakkal, *Green Liberation: Towards an Integral Ecotheology* (Delhi: ISPCK/NCCI, 1999).
[145] Jurgen Moltmann, *The Future of Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 130.
[146] B. R. Ambedkar, *The Untouchables: Who Were They? and why They Became Untouchables* (Delhi: Amrit Book Company, 1948), 121.
[147] Nirmal Minz, Primal Religious Perspective on Ecology, in Daniel D. Chetti (ed) Ecology and Development (Madras: Gurukul Publications, 1991); Sibasis Jana, Bio-Diversity and Deep Commitment: A Deep-Ecological Study of Bengali Dalit Poetry, *Writers Editors Critics*, 7, 2, (2017).

'from below' such as the Dalit and Tribal traditions. Ashok Kumar points out the sacred nature relationship of the Dalit and Tribal ecological traditions, and argues that such traditions approach nature with reverence.[148] By considering the above discussion, I argue that a sacred approach to nature must draw upon ecological resources from the traditions 'from below' and the concept of nature to be sacred must be defined on the grounds of justice as it is the poor and the environment that are most affected by the ecological crisis.

1.6. Conclusion

The religious environmentalism of India reveals that in India nature was considered as a source of life and it was venerated as sacred, enabling people to relate with the rhythms of nature intellectually, emotionally and spiritually.[149] In order to point out the sacredness of nature, Indian religious environmentalism draws ideas about the relationship between human and nature from scriptures to explain the ecological crisis. In their attempts to discuss the Hindu approach to the care of nature, Shiva and Jain hold the claim that the Judeo - Christian approach to nature favoured the scientific advancement which ignored the ecological balance of nature and the human responsibility to care for it. However, it is understood that a sacred approach to nature which is revealed in Hindu religious traditions ignores the sacred traditions 'from below' and do not pay any attention to the myths and legends of the subaltern traditions. But the Indian Christian environmental approach considers ecological traditions 'from below' and environmental justice to the poor as productive resource to evolve a theology of environmental sustainability. I would argue that in order to save the life of the poor and the environment from the ruthless exploitation of the resources of nature, religious environmentalism discussions in India must be grounded on the experience of its environmental victims. As Christianity has been blamed for the historical roots of the ecological crisis, in the next chapter I intend to explain the general view of religious environmentalism based on the questions relating to Christian ethics. The Christian response to Lynn White Jr's challenging essay will be explained within the framework of the ecological re-invention of Christian ethics and Indian Christian cosmological and ethical views regarding nature and the concept of environmentalism 'from below' will also be discussed.

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[148] Ashok Kumar, 'Spiritual Insights on Creation' in Mathew Koshy Punnakkadu (ed) *Earth Sermons – 3* (Chennai: CSI, ISPCK, 2016).
[149] Vandana Shiva, 'Women in Forest', 1999, 74.

Chapter 2
Re-visiting Religious environmentalism with Ethical Questions

2.1. Introduction

In his well-known 1969 *Science* essay Lynn White Jr opened a new perspective to understand the historical roots of the ecological crisis by arguing that religion is key to environmental behaviours.[1] He argued that instrumentalism towards the environment was promoted by medieval Christian interpretations of the Genesis creation story, and that in the colonial era this had displaced animist approaches which, he argued, were more respectful of the nonhuman because they saw it as sacred. In line with this perspective, religious environmentalism aims at repairing the modern disconnect between human beings and nature based on moral ethical principles.[2] The relationship between religion and environmental concerns are the main concerns of moral ethical principles based on the concepts of sacred and ecological sustainability. This chapter begins with an argument that moral ethical principles rooted in Christian ecological tradition are necessary to address ecological injustice which breeds greed, competition and consumerism, particularly in a country like India where everything is considered to be sacred. Although Indian religious environmental discussions pay attention to the traditional view that everything is sacred, in reality the Dalits and the Tribal communities whose life are connected with nature are not been placed under the conceptual frame of sacred. Defining the concept of sacred nature without the perspectives of such socially and culturally excluded communities and the victims of environmental problems is ethically problematic.

This chapter consists of two parts. The first part pays attention to the general finding of White. Bringing White's general finding about the root cause of the ecological crisis into the first part of this chapter has a special significance, because by upholding White's claim Vandana Shiva and Pankaj Jain strongly argue that Judeo-Christian approaches to nature are not sufficiently relevant in an Indian

[1] Lynn White Jr., 'The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis', 1203-7.
[2] Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: University Press,1996)

context.[3] Jain ignores the possible ecological dialogue with Christian ethicists. However, considering such arguments in this chapter it is proposed to look at White's criticism of Christian views regarding the intrinsic value of nature and moral ethical principles. It is understood that environmental crisis is the crisis of environmental victims and the poor. Therefore the following discussions will reveal the significant role of environmental justice, which plays an important role in the pursuit of the goal of sustainable living of all living and non-living being of the planet earth.

The second part of this chapter is concerned with explaining why Indian Christian environmental perspectives seem relevant in addressing environmental problems. Indian Christian environmental theology is keen to explain the relationality of nature and the human response to the creator God and God's creations. This approach depicts the cosmological consciousness of communities whose religious life, culture and rituals are connected with nature. Theological articulations of such cosmologies provide a liberative ground for nature, which groans for a sustaining ecosystem. As detailed in the first chapter, in India religious environmentalism cannot perform its responsibility without listening to the cry of environmental victims and the poor since their ecological consciousness offers religious environmental activism. Therefore, a relevant theology emerges from below which is capable of sensing the groaning of the environmental victims and wounded nature.

2.2. The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis and the Ethical Questions

White invites a re-thinking about the human approach to ecological problems in the West. Through his challenging work, he does not ignore the potential role of religion if finding solution to repair the relationship between the human and nature.[4] His criticism begins from the theme of Judeo-Christian "domination" over nature. He believes that the Judeo-Christian "domination" theme in the book of Genesis provided affinity to technological advances in Europe in the Middle Ages, which furthered a culture of overexploitation of the resources of nature. In order to support this finding he referred to the creation story from the Old Testament in which God commands people to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and

[3] Vandana Shiva, *Earth Democracy. Justice Sustainability and Peace* (London: Zed Books Ltd,2005); Pankaj Jain, *Dharma and Ecology of Hindu Communities* (London: Ashgate, 2011).
[4] Lynn White, The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis, *Science*, 155, (1967), 1203-7; reprinted in David Spring and Eileen Spring, *Ecology and Religion in History*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 15-31.

have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Gen. 1:28). He points out the move from anthropocentric tradition to an attempt to neglecting animistic tradition altered environment unethically. In his response to Christian approach to environment he argues that Christianity rejected the animistic views of the pre-Christian cultures which had been living in harmony with nature. Environmentalists agree with White's criticism that Judeo-Christian teaching about creation polarized the relationship between God and nature, and conveniently used this polarized approach to further technological and industrial development.[5]

Religious response to ecological crisis considers White's critique and proposes reconstructive cosmologies. White says that, "what people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to the things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny – that is, by religion."[6] Several scholars follow White's approach of "greening the world religions" in their attempts to maintain harmonious relationships between humans and nature.[7]

Dale Jamieson supports Lynn White by referring to cultural and ideological factors as the primary concern of his essay. He believes in the likelihood of a religious solution as revealed in White's hope toward mitigating the ecological crisis.[8] He finds the influential role of religious ideas about nature to be a medium of addressing ecological problems and claims that ideas have consequences in human responses to environmental movements because people's beliefs, values, and commitments matter.[9] He remarks that,

> White located the source of the environmental crisis in the exploitative attitude towards nature that is at the heart of the dominant strand of the Christian traditions. As a historian of science and technology, White did not underestimate their importance to the environmental crisis. However, he saw them as proximate rather than ultimate cause. On his view, science and

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[5] Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics,* 1996, 83.
[6] *Lynn White*, *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, *1974*), 23.
[7] See Loren Wilkinson, *Earthkeeping: Christian Stewardship of Natural Resources* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1980.; Francis A. Schaeffer and Udo W. Middelmann, *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1970).; Calvin B. Dewitt, 'The Scientist and the Shepherd: The Emergence of Evangelical Environmentalism', in Roger S. Gottlieb (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
[8] Dale Jamieson, *Ethics and the Environment: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 20.
[9] Dale Jamieson, *Ethics and the Environment: An Introduction*, 22.

> technology themselves are expressions of the dominant tendencies within Christianity.[10]

Jamieson tries to approach White's reference to Christianity as an "anthropocentric" religion in a different way. For him Near Eastern religious traditions are fundamentally "theocentric." It is his argument that, "In both Judaism and Islam, God is utterly transcendent. He is radically distinct from humans as he is from nature. Both humans and nature are his handiwork, but they are not in any way divine."[11] He compares the Near Eastern religious traditions with Far Eastern religious traditions such as Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism to explain anthropocentricism. According to Jamieson,

> In the traditions of the Far East – Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism, for example – the idea of the divinity of Jesus would not come as a big news. For in these traditions divinity is seen as manifest among all living things. Indeed, within these traditions the goal of spiritual practice is often seen as the realisation of the divinity within oneself. In contrast to Christianity, what all of these traditions share is the rejection of anthropocentricism. It is this anthropocentricism, which White believes is unique to the dominant form of Christianity, that gave rise to the development of modern science and technology, which in turn has led to the environmental crisis.[12]

Jamieson agrees with White's view that the anthropocentric approach to nature emerged with the beginning of the development of new forms of ploughing, irrigation and logging, which marked the beginning of the rise of modern science and technology. The widespread adoption of such technologies influenced the modern view of the world and believed that nature is to be managed by humans for their benefit. However, White recognises that there were oppositions from a minority tradition within Christianity, who believed that the human role is to live in partnership with nature, and domination over nature is a sin. He highlights Francis of Assis' approach to nature as an example of a minority tradition within Christianity and argues that in order to address the present environmental crisis the remedy must be learned from such minority traditions, as well as from Asia and the ecological traditions found in indigenous cultures.[13] Christian environmental theologies, which have been shaped by White's ecological arguments, inspire theologians to seek nature friendly religious traditions to address the destructive alliance of science and technology with religious perspectives.

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[10] Dale Jamieson, *Ethics and the Environment: An Introduction*, 20.
[11] Dale Jamieson, *Ethics and the Environment: An Introduction*, 21.
[12] Dale Jamieson, *Ethics and the Environment: An Introduction*, 21.
[13] Lynn White Jr., 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis', 1207.

2.3. The Ecological Reinvention of Christian Ethics

Carolyn Merchant, the author of "The Death of Nature" argues that Christian-rooted images of the earth as a living organism served as important ethical and cultural restraints against the denudation of nature.[14] *The Death of Nature* explains that the ecological and economic changes journeyed together in Western Europe during the period of the rise of mercantile capitalism and the nation state. In her opinion population pressures, the development of expansionistic capitalism in the forms of commercialisation and industrialisation were the major factors which caused the emergence of attitudes against ecological concerns.[15] She tries to argue that the above mentioned anti-ecological means are not Christian approaches. Similarly, Clarence J. Glacken explicitly makes the point that the scientific-technical-industrial revolution played a considerable role in keeping the eye of dominance over nature, and not the religions.[16]

Paying considerable attention to moral ethical issues related to environment Northcott points out the historical root of ecological crisis. According to him the historical roots of the environmental crisis have been influenced by complex historical/cultural, and moral and ethical issues.[17] Adding a moral crisis to the ecological crisis Northcott explains why people are keeping their moral climate away from their commitment to sustain the life of creation. He substantiates this finding within a religious sense that, "the disembedding of people from nature and community by the money economy and the industrialization of food, work, leisure also reflects and enhances the disembedding of human consciousness and community from the sacred cosmos."[18] From the Christian ethical point of view the environmental crisis is understood as a moral issue.[19] Theological and ethical responses to this crisis offer a ray of hope for a new age of ecological responsibility.

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[14] Carolyne Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 2-3.
[15] Carolyne Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, 63–68.
[16] Clarence J. Glackon, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 494-495.
[17] Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
[18] Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, 1996, 83.
[19] Wesley Granberg - Michaelson, *A Worldly Spirituality: The Call to take Care of the Earth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984); Richard Cartwrit Austin, *Hope for the Earth: Nature in the Bible* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988); Nancy G. Wright & Kill Donald, *Ecological Healing: A Christian Vision* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993); Sean McDonagh, *Passion for the Earth* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994); Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

It is well understood that "environmental questions are not primarily economic questions: they are first ethical and then political."[20]

Keeping to the concept, nature as sacred, Northcott generates a traditional natural law ethic from the Hebrew Christian tradition which provides a sound ecological ethic, well grounded in the ideas of created order, natural justice, natural wisdom and the relationality of human and non-human life.[21] He provides critical surveys of ethical perspectives on environmental problems and reconstructs the natural law tradition of Christian ethics to formulate relevant ecological perspectives. His biblically grounded natural law ethics directs human attention to look at the similar ecological wisdom from other traditions. The progression of his ecological ethical frame is succinctly marked in the idea of the recovery of a relationality approach. He formulates this approach based on the Hebrew and Christian tradition, which argues that human, societies and the nonhuman world are teleologically ordered in different but related ways.[22] Northcott exemplifies the first commandment of the Decalogue as a manifestation of knowing the orientation of life given by God is perfectly revealed in the form of natural law. The commandment is to worship God, the giver of life. No idols, but worship God, God alone. Here idolisation is linked with abuse, God and the natural law. He summarises this recovery of relationality approach in this way;

> The centrality of worship in this vision of ethics points to the normal significance of worshiping communities in which the dependence of all life on God, and the gifted and relational character of all forms of life on earth, are celebrated and affirmed, and in which those values or virtues which make for the good life, and the common good, of both human society and the land, are pursued and legitimated.[23]

He precisely points out the vision of recovery of relationality by relating to the moral practices of the worshipping communities. For him, this vision is embedded in the moral practices which are known as the virtues; love and justice, temperance and prudence, fidelity and courage, hope and peaceableness. These virtues, according to him, "enable us to become more fulfilled as persons, to live in solidarity with one

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[20] Max Oelschlaeger, *Caring for Creation: An Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis* (New York: Vail-Ballou Press, 1994), 114.
[21] Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
[22] Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, 1996, 313.
[23] Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, 1996, 314.

another and to live in harmony with the created order."[24] The covenant made between the creator God and the people of Israel (Is. 5: 8 – 10) is a reminder of the relationship between moral law and natural law, which calls for a faithful human commitment to worship and ethics based on God's righteousness. Northcott points out that "this moral law expresses a dynamic relationship between the worship of God and the harmony of created order, and between social justice and ecological harmony."[25] The moral practices in relation to care for the created order are grounded upon natural law that reflects the sacred image.

Hessel presents seven key themes based on the conservation of ethics in Christianity. "The first theme deliberates on scripture and tradition based on Christian ethics in ecologically-alert terms. The second theme explains interrelatedness between cosmology, spirituality and morality. The third theme offers a strong critique and response to discursive areas of conventions underlying modern philosophy, religion, technology and politics. The fourth theme points out the theological and pragmatic commitment to sustainable community. The fifth theme explains affirmation about God in ecological languages. The sixth theme deliberates the formulation and transformation of Christian ecological virtue ethics focused on justice for all. The seventh theme affirms human commitment to respect and care for the earth, and consider it as God's creation and dwelling place, ensuring justice for biodiversity as well as humankind."[26] Hessel's key themes contribute a substantial discursive approach to environmental discourse to think and act for sustainable living of the human and non-human parts of God's creation.

Tim Gorringe presents a theme about common good as an ethical perspective in transforming all living and non-living communities to construct graceful environments in which both human and non-human can flourish.[27] This perspective reminds justice concerns towards envisioning discussions about practicing sustainability. The above-mentioned themes substantiate the responsibility to conserve resources, protect biodiversity, and respect all beings, both human and nonhuman, by acknowledging the concept of environmental justice.

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[24] Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, 1996, 314.
[25] Michael S. Northcott, 'The Spirit of Environmentalism' in R. J. Berry (ed) *The Care of Creation: Focusing Concern and Creation* (Leicester: Inter-varsity Press, 2000), 171.
[26] quoted in H. S. A. Yahya, *Biodiversity Conservation Ethics in Major religions*, 30-31.
[27] Tim Gorringe, *The Common Good and the Global Emergency* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

2.4. Religious Approach to Environmental Justice

The National People of Colour Environmental Leadership Summit which was held on October 24-27, 1991, in Washington DC, drafted and adopted 17 principles of Environmental Justice. The principles of Environmental Justice begin with the declaration that it affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction. It also affirms the right of the environmental victims and the quality life of all living and non-living beings.[28] Environmental justice enters as a movement into the life of the earth community.

Dieter T. Hessel in his attempt to explain environmental justice, finds a dual crisis; degradation of the natural environment and impoverishment of low-power people. Ecological health and social justice is at the centre of his approach to environmental justice. According to him, "Eco-justice occurs wherever human beings receive enough substance and build enough community to live harmoniously with God, to achieve equity among humans, and to appreciate the rest of creation for its own sake and not simply as useful to humanity."[29] Drawing from Abrahamic faith and Sabbath sensibility and Covenant law from the Hebrew Bible, Hessel elaborates eco-justice to attend both ecological integrity and social equity together. In his opinion the Hebrew Biblical covenant law tradition fosters deep respect for the integrity of creation, for widows, the fatherless, the sojourner.[30] His idea of eco-justice aims at human response to care for the poor and care for the earth. In a more sacred sense he uses the term 'vocation' to refer to human response. Therefore, people being members of a worshipping community or religious community should be responsible for their vocation. He writes about the objective of human vocation; "The human vocation is to the Creator Deliverer, who declares that the whole creation is good, and who executes justice for the oppressed, utilizing covenant people as participants."[31] He adds that human vocation is also be recognised to work with the rest of nature to meet common needs based on the moral principle of ecological integrity based on social equity.

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[28] http://www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.html, viewed on 23/06/2015.
[29] Dieter T Hessel, *Theology for Earth Community* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 12.
[30] In order to support theologically and explain eco-justice Hessel quotes Exodus 23, Leviticus 19 and 25, and Deuteronomy 15. According to him these passages "exemplify the covenant obligation to respond to the poor, to let the land lie fallow, and to cancel debts periodically, if not redistribute land." Dieter T Hessel, *Theology for Earth Community* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 13.
[31] Dieter T Hessel, *Theology for Earth Community* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 13.

Paul T. Jersild et al, present justice centred religious environmentalism, as a theme that sustainability is a Biblical, theological and tradition based ethic.[32] Martin-Schram & Stivers opine that in the Christian tradition justice is an essential part of God's community of love and calls human beings to make fairness the touchstone of social relations and relations to each other species and ecosystems.[33] It is the social and ecological expression of love and requires a special concern for the poor, a rough calculation of freedom and equality, and a passion for establishing equitable relationships.[34] Therefore it could be argued that the order of the universe manifests the justice of God.[35] Northcott points out the Hebrew Christian views regarding ecological justice arguably in connection with the covenantal life, demanding respect for the land, and recognition of the moral constraints on its use. He describes that moral spiritual ground and its relationship with the land are inextricably connected in this way. The Hebrew Bible depicts a deep relationality between God's chosen people to live justly and morally and the fertility and goodness of the land.

By framing the argument for a sacred ecological sustainable setting, Northcott shows how justice is being tied with Christian natural law tradition and its moral relationship with the cosmos. In his words, "the Christian natural law tradition locates moral value in a relational account of the common good of humans and the cosmos, and in the quest for the diversity of human and non-human goods in particular moral communities where the virtues of justice, compassion and prudence are generated and sustained."[36] The idea of justice in Christian environmental discourse is increasingly explicated in the moral practices of worshipping communities. Considering this dimension Northcott argues that the world can be considered as a worshipping community or a parish, and witness to justice is its environmental commitment to the planet earth. He succinctly points out the role of 'witness to justice' in transforming consumeristic societies. According to him,

> without a witness to justice it is doubtful that parish churches or any other kind of Christian community can be said to be places of good news to those people who are excluded from the riches of the North, and for those animals and plants, fish and rivers, mountains and lakes, oceans and wilderness, whose

[32] Paul T. Jersild et al., eds. *Moral Issues and Christian Response* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998).208-212.
[33] James B. Martin- Schramm & Robert L. Stivers, *Christian Environmental Ethics* (New York: Orbis Books, 2003).37.
[34] James B. Martin- Schramm & Robert L. Stivers, *Christian Environmental Ethics*, 2003, 37.
[35] Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, 1996, 268-269.
[36] Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, 1996, 121.

> beauty, order and fecundity is every day threatened by the advancing juggernaut of modern consumerism.[37]

The approach to ecological sustainability is directly linked with justice concerns of faith communities and their commitment to repairing planet earth. I would argue that the faith tradition of communities, their moral practices rooted in the intrinsic value of nature and the virtues of justice can lead religious environmentalism to the dimension of the discourse of sustainability.

2.5. Religious Environmentalism as Sustainability Discourse

Religions function as a multifaceted tool in sustainability discourse. According to Crispin Tickel, "Environment is the stuff of religion, and religion is the stuff of environment."[38] This mode of understanding nature significantly contributes to religious environmental discussions and explores the interconnectedness between human beings and the non-human parts of creation in all socio-cultural and geographical locations. Roger Gottlieb positively links religion to environmental discussions in order to formulate practical responses towards the environmental crisis. Gottlieb is of the opinion that religion is becoming a source of good environmental news, a place to look for emergent forms of human identity in an environmental age. Gottlieb argues that religious environmentalism is a diverse, vibrant, global movement, a rich source of new ideas, institutional commitment, political activism, and spiritual inspiration.[39] His discussion regarding religious environmentalism explains how religious thinking has changed, and how religious institutions have committed themselves to environmental causes.[40]

In the view of Johnston, religions describe actions and motivations of a particular people in particular places and how they understand and use it, formulates sacred discourse.[41] Johnston says that, "religion is intimately intertwined with many facets of human lives that are not themselves essentially or explicitly religious,

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[37] Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, 1996, 325-326.
[38]Crispin Tickel, Religion and the Environment in R. J. Berry, *Environmental Stewardship: Critica; Perspective – Past and Present* (London: T & T Clark International,2006).220.
[39] Roger S. Gottlieb, *A Greener Faith: Religious Environmentalism and Our Planet's Future* (Oxford University Press, 2006).215
[40] Roger S. Gottlieb, *A Greener Faith: Religious Environmentalism and Our Planet's Future* (Oxford University Press, 2006).90-92.
[41] Lucas F. Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability: Social Movements and the Politics of the Environment,* (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2013), 18.

including sustainability advocacy and conservation behaviours."[42] In his work, *Religion and Sustainability* Johnston argues that "Sustainability as a revolution emerged in the United States and European Union countries as they grappled with the limits of natural resources and is quickly spreading to developing nations, though it has yet to become a pervasive mainstream phenomenon."[43] For Johnston a religious dimension is an important part of the sustainability discourse.[44] He believes that it is one of the primary facilitators of communication among people with differing value structures. It is his argument that "there is a strong religious dimension to nearly all sustainability advocacy, and that the myths from the collected stories that sustainability advocates project into the public sphere is itself religious."[45] His view is that sustainability advocacy should be used to address the ecological crisis and to promote increased biodiversity. He believes that a broad participation based on religions and inclusion of core values in public deliberations, can generate better outcomes.[46] Contrary to this view, scholars like Light and Norton argue that religious commitments and metaphysical philosophies should not be included in public discourse.[47]

The working definition which guided Johnston in his work is;

> Sustainability is a strategy of cultural adaptation to the limitations imposed by the dynamic interplay of ecological and social systems, couched in large scale stories that illustrate how to persist within habitats in a manner that provides genuine affective fulfilment now, and for the foreseeable future.[48]

For him, it is a conceptual device for connecting core values to community narratives within their social and geographical habitats. He highlights the importance of the religious dimension in sustainability, because he affirms that spiritual values are fundamental to the idea of sustainability. He adds the religious dimension of sustainability to the three dimensions of sustainability explained by Andres Edwards; (1) ecology, (2) equity, and (3) economy.[49] According to him, "the religious dimension of sustainability becomes particularly important for the translation and transformation

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[42] Lucas F. Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability: Social Movements and the Politics of the Environment,* 21.
[43] Andrews R. Edwards, The Sustainability Revolutions (Canada: New Society Publishers, 2005).4-5.
[44] Lucas F. Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability: Social Movements and the Politics of the Environment,* 201.
[45] Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability: Social Movements and the Politics of the Environment,* 2013, 201.
[46] Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability: Social Movements and the Politics of the Environment,* 2013, 201
[47] A. Light, Restoring Ecological Citizenship, in B. Minteer & B. Peperman – Taylor, Democracy and The Claims of Nature ,2002; B. Norton, *Sustainability: A Philosophy of Adaptive Ecosystem Management Process* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
[48] Lucas F. Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability: Social Movements and the Politics of the Environment,* (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2013), 25.
[49] Lucas F. Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability: Social Movements and the Politics of the Environment,* 24-27.

of values that occurs when different communities and their accompanying value preferences contact each other in political and social worlds."[50]

Johnston's stand on the religious dimension of sustainability refers to religious language and sustainability used in a local context, and criticises politicians, intellectuals and scholars who frame a global environmental ethic without paying attention to the local communities' needs and desires. He claims that, "The idea of sustainability, and its major benchmarks, have been attended and promoted by both institutional and elite sectors of society as well as resistance-oriented members of civil society."[51] While Darrell Posey has done extensive work in popularizing traditional ecological knowledge and the importance of indigenous peoples to sustainable development and conservation,[52] Parker criticise him and says that such claims perpetuate the romantic portraits of indigenous peoples.[53]

Christian views on sustainability attend the global gap which ignores nature based cultures and their contribution to the perspective of respect and care for nature. For example, Indian Christian contextual theologies such as Dalits and Tribal theologies are deeply rooted in the struggles connected to their life and land, and environment. Indian theologies are contextual in nature and have borrowed theological methodologies from the West, employing them in different contexts of Indian societies such as social justice and equality and ethics. The adoption of such methodological approaches paved a way among Indian Christian theologians to listen to the voices of marginalised communities and inspired them to theologise the socio-cultural and ecological issues. The Christian theological and ethical questions raised on behalf of the victims of the social and environmental crisis have given rise

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[50] Lucas F. Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability: Social Movements and the Politics of the Environment,* 25.

[51] Lucas Johnston, The Religious Dimensions of Sustainability: Institutional Religions, Civil Society, and International Politics since the Turn of the Twentieth Century, Religion Compass 4/3 (2010),179. Johnston opines that, "Although its overall contribution to the quest for sustainability is still contested, the Earth Summit did result in five important outcomes: (1) the approval of the Rio Declaration, which included 27 principles of sustainable development (2) the approval of Agenda 21, a document of over 800 pages which provided sets of guidelines for implementing sustainable development with particular attention to local communities; (3) the creation of the UNs Framework Convention on Climate Change, which drew on the findings of the International Panel on Climate Change; (4) the Convention on Biodiversity, which endorsed the value of indigenous ecological knowledge, and stated that sovereign nations should have rights to the biological resources of their territory; and (5) the Declaration on Forest Principles, which created broad frameworks and recommendations for sustainable use of forest resources." Lucas Johnston, 'The Religious Dimensions of Sustainability: Institutional Religions, Civil Society, and International Politics since the Turn of the Twentieth Century', *Religion Compass* 4/3 (2010),186.

[52] Darrell Posey, *Cultural and Spiritual Values of Biodiversity* (London: Intermediate Technologies,1999).

[53] Eugene Parker, 'Fact and Fiction in Amazonia: The Case of the Apete,' *American Anthropologist*, New Series. 95(3), 1993),715–23.

to the search for drawing theological resources from the victims and their environment.

2.6. Indian Christian Cosmological and Ethical Views on Nature

Cosmological inclusion in Indian Christian theology was popularized by Reymond Panikkar. He presents cosmotheandric principles as a theological tool to articulate eco theology, through which he explains three relational dimensions of "the divine, human and the earthly."[54] He believes that these three relational dimensions constitute interdependence. Unlike other Indian cosmological discussions Panikkar frames a cosmotheandric experience which depicts the presentness and mutual interaction of all species. In his words,

> "Sharing in the unfolding of Life, assisting at the cosmic display of all the forces of the universe, witnessing the deployment of time, playing with the dynamic factors of life, enjoying the mysteries of knowing and no less the mystery of living…… lending sensitivity to the stars and atoms, being the mirror of the universe and reflecting it without distorting it, suffering as well in one's own flesh the disorders of the world…… understanding the songs of the birds, the sounds of the woods and even all the human noises as part of the vitality of reality expanding, living, breathing in and out seeing and experiencing unity in difference and understanding humanity housed in nature, which is disseminated with divine presence and yet absence."[55]

The interconnectedness and interdependence present in nature reveals the sustaining relational nature of the universe.

Panikkar's cosmotheandric principle explains the interwoven relationship of God-World-Human beings and deals with their oneness and interdependence.[56] He envisions a relevant environmental consciousness by referring to three religious cosmological understandings, that of Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism. His aim is to explain a socially connected religious community which necessitates a cosmic confidence. According to him, "cosmic confidence is not trust in the world, but confidence in the cosmos. It is the confidence of the cosmos itself, of which we form a part inasmuch as we simply are—cosmic confidence is not our interpretation of the world. It is that awareness which makes any interpretation possible."[57] He uses the

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[54] Raimon Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1993), 60.
[55] Raimon Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness,* 133.
[56] Raimon Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*, 60.
[57] Raimon Panikkar, 'A Self-Critical Dialogue' in Joseph Prabhu (ed) *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 281.

crisis of the poor in interpreting the world and the cosmos, and reminds Indian religious environmentalists about the interdependence of nature, its crisis, and the crisis of the poor, which as previously stated, is so often ignored in contemporary environmental discussions.

Abraham's search for a new spirituality which is earth oriented is formulated especially for the living and non-living who are oppressed. The struggles of the environmental victims are directly linked with their struggle for survival. Abraham identifies the resistance of the poor in India such as Chipko Movement and Narmada Valley to exemplify how poor women from the Chipko Movement and the poor from the Narmada Valley came together to protect forests from wanton destruction and preserve their own habitats.[58] However, it is understood that in India there is no consistent way of explaining the relationship between the concept of sacred nature and the sufferings of the environmental victims and it is therefore argued that the relational account of nature can only be sustained through justice for the poor and the environment.

2.6.1. Cosmological Consciousness of Communities

Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios points out those cosmic centred environmental discussions can assist in renewing the earth as a bio-spiritual planet. He maintains that each human being is a body-soul integral entity and is part of nature. Nature remains some kind of property, owned not by humans, but by God, who has placed it in our hands for its efficient and productive use.[59] His cosmic centred elaborations reveal that humanity has a special vocation to be the "priest of creation," which perform the representative role in creation to offer the world back to the creator God.[60] He says that creation manifests the creator, and hence humanity has to function as the mediator between heaven and earth, God and God's creation.

Indian Christian theologians have made attempts to evolve an eco-theology by seeing God's creation as sacred in their theological discussions. Ken Gnanakan integrates the attitude of care for nature, and reverence and respect to affirm earth's sacred position.[61] He says that the earth and everything in it is part of God's creation

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[58] K. C. Abraham, *Liberative Solidarity: Contemporory Perspectives on Mission* (Thiruvalla: CSS, 1996).
[59] Paulos Mar Gregorios, *The Human Presence: Ecological Spirituality and the Age of the Spirit* (New York, Amity House, 1987), 87.
[60] Paulos Mar Gregorios, *The Human Presence: Ecological Spirituality*, 1987, 82-89.
[61] Ken Gnanakan, *God's World A Theology of the Environment* (London, SPCK,1999).32

and therefore it should be treated appropriately. He believes that the earth is the handiwork of God therefore the earth is qualified as good. It is his opinion that God's revelation in our world divinizes the earth in preparation for the complete transformation to come.[62] Gnanakan asserts that the earth and all life on earth is sacred, and emphasises that as each human being is unique and an integral part of earth's community of life, they have a special responsibility to care for life in all its diverse forms.[63] From this thinking he arrives at the conclusion that since human life is rooted in the natural process of the earth there must be a system of sustainability to preserve the life support system of the earth.

Samuel Rayan portrays the silence of the earth as a divine manifestation to understand its sacredness, and to respond to its load of sorrows and silence.[64] The silence of the earth is fully reflected in the ecological consciousness of the marginalised communities in India such as Dalit, Tribal and Adivasi communities. Nalunnakkal uses their ecological discourse as a powerful resource in order to explain green cosmology and ecological issues. In his words, "the issues of the tribals (and of Dalits) are integrally related to the struggles for the right to ownership of land, which, in turn, an integral component of ecological movements in the Third World countries like India."[65] The cosmological traditions of Dalit and Tribal communities are rich in nurturing an ecological consciousness and in contributing to the understanding of the environmental problems in their local living habitats.

2.6.2. Liberation of Nature and the Poor

Abraham invites attention to listen to the cries of the poor. It is his claim that the ecological crisis is rightly the cry of the poor. Their experience of deprivation and exploitation is linked with environmental degradation and therefore their perspective on these problems should be the starting point of environmental discussion. Therefore he argues that environmental theology is concerned with preserving and caring for nature.[66] According to him the experience of the marginalized in every context, their suffering and longing for a new life, demand a new paradigm of

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[62] Ken Gnanakan, *God's World A Theology of the Environment*, 1999, 32
[63] Ken Gnanakan, *God's World A Theology of the Environment*, 1999, 50
[64] Samuel Rayan, *Breath of Fire: The Holy Spirit Heart of the Christian Gospel* (London, G. Chapman, 1979).
[65] George Mathew Nalunnakkal, *Green Liberation,* XV111
[66] K. C. Abraham, "Christian Ethics: Methodological Issues," in Hunter P. Mabry (ed), *Doing Christian Ethics: Context and Perspectives* (Bangalore: BTESSC, 1996), 78.

theologising.[67] In his discussion about globalization he envisions possible resistance to the formation of new values "that emerge out of alternative politics such as "conservation not consumerism; need, not greed; enabling power, not dominating power, (and) integrity of creation, not exploitation of creation."[68] He looks for a method of theologizing within a frame work of an orthopraxis, which involves commitment to Christ and creative action in dialogue with people of all faiths and secular ideologies. This is with full awareness of the disastrous effect of globalization on the economic situation of the poor, cultural cohesion and destruction of creation.[69] His argument for a methodological shift necessitates a critical analysis of Indian religious environmentalism in order for it to be more beneficial in the formulation of an eco-theology.

Abraham proposes three models for the Church to follow in relation to eco-justice concerns. They are (a.) As greed is the source of the emergence of the ecological crisis, an ascetic or monastic model that emphasizes the life of renunciation is required. (b.) The Sacramental/Eucharistic model in which life and all its relationships are brought into the worshipful presence of God and are constantly being renewed. (c.) A Liberative-solidarity model in which the church shows solidarity with the weakest, and the parts of creation which are victimized, and seeks liberation. Of the three, Abraham proposes the liberative –solidarity model for restoring justice for the marginalized and exploited environment.[70] According to this model, the Church is in solidarity with the weakest; with the whole of creation. Human relationship with one another and human relationship with nature and the universe are the two themes of his approach. According to him we are committed to the struggle for the transformation of the poor, the weak, and the disfigured and over-exploited nature. Therefore he suggests that in India churches should enter into an act of covenanting, and commit themselves to fight for the marginalised -- Dalits, tribals and women -- to build a just economic order, to commit themselves to sustainable development; justice, peace and the integrity of creation in our country.

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[67] K. C. Abraham, *Voices from the Third World*, XXI (1998), 1
[68] K. C. Abraham, 'A Theological Response to Ecological Crisis', *Bangalore Theological Forum*, 25 (1993), 70.
[69] Abraham, 'A Theological Response to Ecological Crisis',147.
[70] Abraham, *Eco-Justice*, 23-27.

Therefore action for justice is a source of hope for the healing and restoration of the earth.[71]

Rayan, a prominent Indian Catholic theologian, sees ecological problems as a form of social pollution. According to him social pollution is an ecological problem that has to do with the habitability of our earth-home.[72] He believes that it manifests itself in the existence of massive poverty and destitution, with their degrading and destructive consequences, existing side by side with enormous wealth, affluence and vulgar ostentation and unbridled consumerism.

2.6.3. Liturgical approach to Nature: Ecological Manifestation of Worshiping Communities

In India in general and South India in particular, religious life is totally connected to the rhythm of agricultural activities in the village. The agricultural cycle and yield from their cultivation are often part of their religious celebrations. It is in this context that the farmers' various beliefs and practices regarding crops, plants and trees obtained legitimacy and were imbued with sacred stories and images. From the very beginning farmers were dependent on supernatural powers for getting protection for their crops, and in return offered "ecological offerings" such as offerings of flowers, coconuts, cereals, paddy and coconut palms and saplings.[73] These practices strengthened their religious approach to nature when they turned to the level of worshipping communities, and helped accept seasonal prayers and liturgies connected with their ecological consciousness.

Indian traditional cultural practices such as arathi, kolam, and prayer for crops have entered into the liturgical observances in the rural villages in South India, especially among Dalit and Adivasi parishes, based on the belief that God cares and provides for them and for the entire creation. This reflection is well explained in the Christian Scripture that all creatures of the earth belong to God, and are precious to the Creator. By analysing ecological practices of the Christian communities in India Vijay D. Anand opines that the liturgical connectedness of all living and non-living

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[71] Samuel Rayan, 'Theological Perspectives on the Environmental Crisis' in R. S. Sugirtharajah (ed), *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 233

[72] Rayan, 'Theological Perspectives on the Environmental Crisis', 1994, 224

[73] Vasudha Narayanan, 'Religious Vows at the Shrine of Sahul Hamid', in Selva J. Raj & William P. Harman (ed) *Dealing with Deities: The Ritual Vow in South Asia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 72.

beings have an inherent value to God as they all carry His life-giving spirit.[74] In worship, respect and care for nature is realised as a sacramental experience through liturgical engagements.

Liturgy is the celebration of the experience of God. The members of the worshipping community, their living world, and their yearning for maintaining a quality of life are part of the celebration of their liturgical life. Paul Puthanangadi considers liturgy to be a challenge to continue the battle against evil. In his words,

> When the church celebrates the liturgy, she is not only in communion with the risen Lord, but also with the human community struggling towards the realisation of the new earth and heaven,,,, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well.[75]

Liturgical practice unites worshipping communities and encourages them to realise the relationship between the Creator God and all creations. The Worship elements of different liturgies such as praise and worship, Baptism, Eucharist and burial express the interconnectedness between God, Human beings and all living and non-living beings. It is the prime belief that the Eucharist, an important sacrament for Christians, removes the root cause of all slavery and oppression, namely, human selfishness, which creates a world order of enslavement and exploitation and deforms the creation which God intended to be good. It is boldly accepted that the Eucharistic celebration produces a new cosmic community and new world order where the cry of the poor will be heard.

2.6.4. Cry of the Poor: Environmentalism from Below

During the last two decades, Indian Christian Theology, has played a significant role in propagating ecological visions in various ways but has made little attempt to relate the vision that care for nature is directly connected with care for poor. The reality is that in the past, insufficient attention has been paid to developing a theology relevant to the struggles of the poor.[76] K. C. Abraham has linked the problems of the poor by connecting their struggles to the ecological crisis. He claims that the interconnectedness between the renewal of human communities and the renewal of the earth is evidently reflected in the struggles of the marginalised

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[74] Vijay D Anand, Creation Care: The Mission of God in Santhosh S. Kumar 78-87

[75] Paul Puthanangadi, 'Liturgy for the Creation of a New Earth and New Heaven' in Santhosh S. Kumar (ed) *Participating in God's Mission Today* (Thiruvalla: CSS, 2011), 109.

[76] K. C. Abraham, 'Asian Theology Looking to 21st Century', *Voices from the Third World*, 20/2 (1997), 93

communities.[77] He believes that the renewal is possible when human communities participate in the struggles to liberate the oppressed communities from exploitation and liberate the bonded earth from the over exploitative attitude of human beings.

According to Abraham the problems of the poor and the concerns of the environment are inextricably intertwined, and maintains that it is important to look at the problem of the poor from the perspective of eco-justice. He writes, "The cry of the poor, the groaning of creation, is for justice and that is the focal point of our theology and our spirituality that relates to cosmic, creational concerns… this justice concerns the right relationships between human beings and other segments of creation. Broadening the understanding of justice to embrace the ecological concerns – eco-justice – is called for."[78] The problem here is that his understanding of eco-justice is limited within liberation ideologies, which do not take seriously the intrinsic value of the non-living beings and their entitlement.

George Zachariah understands the cry of the poor as an expression of the prognosis of the victims. Their cry expresses, "the pathos, the experience of God-forsakenness, the discernment of unjust social relations, envisioning alternatives, revolutionary patience for the unfolding of utopia, and the radical experiences of epiphany."[79] He considers that the groaning of the victims is a discourse from below, which signifies a diversity of existential realms. For him groaning is a manifestation of the protest of the victims which calls for counter engagements with the problem that leads to new diagnosis informed by their experiences. From this perspective he understands the groaning of creation as a theological resource from below which compels us to perceive ecological crisis as genocide and ecocide. In his words, "Groaning of creation is more than a public protest; it is also a public witness of the God whom the wounded creation continues to meet in the midst of their sufferings and struggles."[80] Therefore, God the creator is understood as a co-sufferer, and God is very much present in the midst of their struggles. Their victimised experiences emerge from below in order to find alternatives toward healing of all the living and non-living communities of the planet earth.

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[77] K. C. Abraham, 'Asian Theology Looking to 21st Century', 92-94
[78] K. C. Abraham, 'Liberation: Human and Cosmic', in Daniel D. Chetti (ed), *Ecology and Development: Theological Perspectives* (Madras: Gurukul Theological College), 77.
[79] George Zachariah, 'Healing of the Earth: A Call to Public Witness' *Religion and Society*, 56, 3-4, (2011), 2.
[80] George Zachariah, 'Healing of the Earth: A Call to Public Witness' *Religion and Society*, 56, 3-4, (2011), 6.

G. David asks Indian churches to speak for the marginalised sections of society who are the victims of the present pattern of development. In his words the cry of the poor and the groaning of creation for justice should be the central focus around which we need to take the struggle.[81] He extends his vision that people need to struggle along with the victims of crisis in their own creative ways by keeping a participatory perspective of creating a just, equitable, sustainable and eco-friendly world.

India is a land of multi-faith traditions and I acknowledge the importance of critical engagement with Indian religious environmentalism. However, the dominant religion's approach to environmentalism has not seriously engaged with the discourse of environmental victims and the poor. Religious beliefs and practices should contribute to the benefit of nature and the environmental victims based on ecologically and socially adaptive ways. I would argue that the Indian Christian approach, to respect and care for nature, must be nurtured by the Western Christian environmental theology, which gives equal consideration to the quality of life of nature and the poor. Indian Christian theology which is rooted in the discourse "from below" with a liberation motif can be used as an appropriate tool to address environmental problems in India. Northcott says that the discourse of suffering is a discourse 'from below'.[82] Therefore socially excluded communities and the environment should be the locus of theological enquiry because "the oppression of the poor is intricately connected with the destruction of environments and habitats throughout human history as well as in the contemporary developing world.[83] I believe that this view of religious environmentalism is important but unfortunately so often lacking in Indian religious environmental discourse.

2.7. Conclusion

Religions have a creative, influencing role to play in making communities more environmentally friendly and can lead its adherents in a more sustainable direction when its cosmologies are explained in the light of the pain and pathos of nature and the poor. What is central in religious environmentalism is the affirmation of an inextricable connection between ecological issues and justice from the

[81] G. David, Ecology, Economy and Religion: Need for a Fundamental Reorientation' *Theology for Our Times*, 6 (1999), 23.
[82] Michael S, Northcott, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming* (London: DLT,2007), 42.
[83] Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, 314.

perspectives of the environmental victims. The environmental justice and moral ethical principles which emerge from the cosmological consciousness of the environmental victims, reveal an ecological relationality with nature. It is argued that in all attempts to repair the disconnect between human beings and nature; approaches such as re-inventing religious ethics,[84] critically redefining the sacred,[85] and environmentalism from below,[86] are vital in formulating a relevant environmental theology. A theology of environmental sustainability becomes relevant when it hears the cry of the victims of the environmental crisis and understands nature to be the body of God.

As India is rich in different religious traditions, I would argue that in order to address the issue of environmental crisis in a collective way, it is vital that faith communities explore the nature-human relationship to be found in indigenous communities. As argued by White, religion is considered to be a robust medium to cultivate environmental behaviour among faith communities. A Christian approach to sustainability takes account of the global gap which ignores nature-based cultures and their contribution to the perspective of respect and care for nature. For example, Indian Christian contextual theologies such as Dalits and Tribal traditions are deeply rooted in the struggles connected to their life, land, and nature. However, the above findings are not being proved with substantial evidence by Indian environmentalists or eco-theologians. Therefore, my next chapters will be concerned with environmental sustainability discourse based on the concept of sacred with special reference to the religious and ecological locations of four dioceses of the Church of South India and a forest dwelling Tribal community in the Thiruvananthapuram District of Kerala. The Kerala Protestant Christian's approach to caring for nature is explored and analysed on the basis of the ecological landscape of the Kani tribe in Kerala. This will be done in order to discover indigenous ecological behaviour which exists in the Indian Christian approach to nature and will help examine theoretically and formulate a theology of environmental sustainability by considering the emerged ethical and theological themes.

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[84] Michael S. Northcott, A Political Theology of Climate Change (London: SPCK, 2014), 26-49.
[85] Michael S, Northcott, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming*, 256-257
[86] Michael S, Northcott, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming*, 42.

Part 2

Chapter 3

The Emergence of the Concept of Sustainability and the Sacred: An Ethnographic Approach to the Ecological Landscape of CSI Dioceses in Kerala and the Kani Tribal Colony in Puravimala

3.1. Introduction

The concepts of the scared and sustainability are the major themes of my research which was well analysed on the basis of different material gathered from the four dioceses of the Church of South India in Kerala, and Kani tribal colony in Puravimala, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala the southern forest ranges of the Western Ghats. Kerala had a strong religious and cultural foundation immersed with the notion of the sacred. There was a Tamil proverb commonly used in Southern Kerala which reveals a deep sense of ecological consciousness. Samuel Mateer, a missionary of the London Missionary Society (LMS) had recorded that proverb which depicts connection with a commonly grown Palmyra tree, which says; “Nattal ayiram, vettal ayiram,” meaning if you plant a tree, it will grow a thousand years; if you cut it, it will lose a thousand years.[1] This proverb reveals their understanding about the integral relationship between human beings and nature. The emergence of the concept of sustainability and the sacred is rooted in the ecological behaviour of the CSI Christians in Kerala and some of the ecological and religious landscape of the indigenous communities in Kerala. This chapter gives an account of the geographical and the ecological features of Kerala and a brief introduction to the CSI Keralan Christian’s approach to sustainability and the sacred, and the ecological world of an indigenous community in Thiruvananthapuram District in Kerala, known as Kani tribal community.

[1] Samuel Mateer, *The Land of Charity: A Descriptive Account of Travancore and its People* (London:John Snow and Co., 1871), 120.

3.2. Geographical and Ecological Features of Kerala

Kerala is a State, situated in the Southern part of India. Geographically Kerala has been divided into three divisions, viz., the highland, the midland and the lowland. The Western Ghats which run along the eastern region of the State are known as the highland. The upper ranges of this region are covered by thick forests. The lower ranges of the Western Ghats are interspersed with plantations. Sreedhara Menon opines that the mountains and hills in the Western Ghats have been of great value in safeguarding the territorial integrity and political freedom of the land.[2] The western side of the state stretches along the coastal plain, and its soil is sandy, where coconut trees are cultivated largely and widely. Besides this cultivation, paddy is also extensively cultivated here. Between the highland and the lowland is the Midland, which consists of isolated hills and slopes that extends to the valley. Its laterite soil region is rich in agricultural produce, paddy, tapioca, spices and cashew. Its higher elevations are filled with tea, cardamom plantations and pepper, rubber, ginger and turmeric grow in the lower elevations.

Climatically the high ranges have a cool and bracing climate throughout the year, while the plains are hot and humid. The average level of annual rainfall in the State is 96. Kerala is rich in flora, fauna, and mineral resources. Sreedhara Menon writes,

> the aromatic plants and spices of Kerala attracted the attention of foreigners even from time immemorial. Such spices as pepper, cardamom, cinnamon and ginger were exported from ancient Kerala to the countries of Asia and Europe and they continue to earn valuable foreign exchange even now. It was the demand for the pepper ('black gold') of Kerala that brought European powers like the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French and the English to the Kerala coast in modern times and led to the establishment of European domination over the country.[3]

The pressure of the increasing population gave cause to forest encroachment, reclamation of wetlands for food production, intensification of agriculture activities and the adaptation of modern technologies in order to increase productivity.[4] Increase in population led to rapid urbanization, industrialization and consumerism,

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[2] A. Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History* (Kottayam: D. C Books, 2016 Third Edition), 15.
[3] A. Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History* (Kottayam: D. C Books, 2016 Third Edition), 20.
[4] Conservation Strategy aizd Policy Statement on Environment and Development - Kerala State (Draft) Government of Kerala, State Committee on Science, Technology and Environment, 1994, p. 1. hodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/503/10/10_chapter3.pdf, viewed on 19/11/2015.

which have in turn led to extensive pollution of air, water and land.[5] Kerala State Council for Science, Technology & Environment notes that,

> the major environment problems in the state associated with water resources are flood, drought, landslides, salinity intrusion, water logging and pollution. The hydrologic modification of wetlands and over exploitation of groundwater also pose challenges in many parts of the state. The major water quality problem associated with rivers and open wells is bacteriological pollution. The dumping of solid waste, bathing and discharge of effluents also create problems. Low pH, high iron etc., are common in well waters in the laterite covered midland areas. High concentrations of fluoride over the permissible levels have been reported from certain parts of Palakkad and Alleppey districts. The salinity level is frequently high in the coastal belt.[6]

Solid waste dumping in residential areas has been common in all cities in Kerala. The State government's official records show that the average waste generation per capita in Kerala has become high compared to the national average. About 26% of total health care institutions in India are located in Kerala and the total quantity of hazardous waste generated and handled in the State is about 82724 tons/year.[7] The residents in Thiruvananthapuram city call the illegal dumping places "mount garbage."[8] Leading medias had reported that "the stench emanating from it is unbearable, with non-degradable and bio-waste all rotting in the open, through the sun or rain."[9] The biodiversity of the forest lands is disappearing due to different factors such as deforestation, unregulated mining, forest fire, construction of dams, diversion for non-forest purposes, soil erosion, unscientific management of protected area and poor regeneration.[10] The Western Ghats, a green heart of biodiversity of Kerala, which is known as the Sahayadaris, is considered one of the global biodiversity hotspots. The Western Ghats has four major forest types and 23 floristic types as well as the unique high-altitude grasslands. Studies reveal the information that it contains more than 30 percent of India's plant, fish, bird and mammal species. But due to number of factors such as mining, power projects, infrastructure projects,

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[5] C.P.R. Environmental Education Centre, Environmental Concerns of India: An introduction (Chennai, Madras, 1996), 61.
[6] http://www.kscste.kerala.gov.in/index.php/programmes-initiatives/environment-ecology/state-of-environment-report, viewed on 13/11/2015.
[7] http://www.kscste.kerala.gov.in/index.php/programmes-initiatives/environment-ecology/state-of-environment-report, viewed on 13/11/2015.
[8] http://www.ndtv.com/thiruvananthapuram-news/garbage-in-the-open-mounting-problem-in-keralas-capital-1248442, viewed on 30/11/2015.
[9] http://www.ndtv.com/thiruvananthapuram-news/garbage-in-the-open-mounting-problem-in-keralas-capital-1248442, viewed on 30/11/2015.
[10] http://www.kscste.kerala.gov.in/index.php/programmes-initiatives/environment-ecology/state-of-environment-report, viewed on 13/11/2015.

and tourism and waste, the Western Ghats has become an ecologically sensitive area.[11] In this terrible environmental crisis situation faith communities in Kerala have to think about the 102 species of mammals, 476 species of birds, 169 species of reptiles, 89 species of amphibians and 202 species of fresh water fish,[12] and the people, who are belonging to the members of the biotic communities which dwell in the State of Kerala.

Although Kerala has many sacred places for pilgrims, all of them are creating water pollution and land pollution. A notable example I can mention here is Pampa river pollution and the ravaging of biodiversity in the region of Sabarimala. The Hindu Newspaper reported that, "the high level of pollution in the Pampa during the annual Mandalam-Makaravilaku pilgrim season at Sabarimala is posing a serious health hazard to lakhs of people living in the downstream reaches of Attathode, Vadasserikkara, Ranni, Kozhencherry, Aranmula, Chengannur, etc. Periodic flushing of the squalid waters from the Pampa bathing ghats in the foothills of Sabarimala has increased pollution in the downstream reaches."[13] Pampa River running close to this pilgrimage centre is highly polluted. Joice K Joseph, Manikandan A.D, Karunakaran Akhil D and A.P Pradeepkumar observe that, "the major source of water supply was river Pampa, which gets extremely polluted during the festival season as the huge mass of pilgrims, who converge at Pampa, use the river for taking a ritual bath as well as cleaning themselves after easing themselves in the vicinity of the river."[14] A. K. Shinde opines that the questions about the environment and environmental changes have become critical in India where more than 100 million people travel to about 2000 pilgrimage sites every year.[15]

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[11] http://ced.org.in/docs/inecc/forest_booklet/0-forest-4-western.pdf, viewed on 06/01/2016.

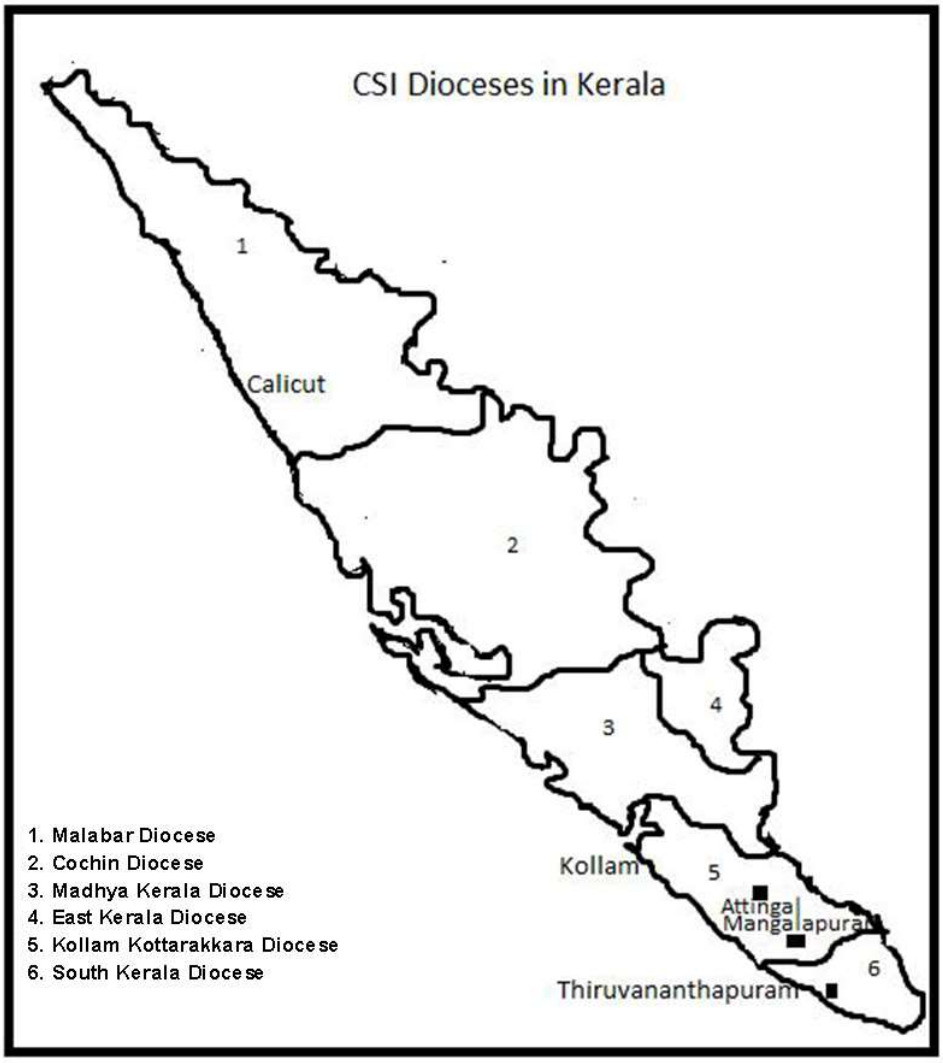
[12] http://www.kscste.kerala.gov.in/index.php/programmes-initiatives/environment-ecology/state-of-environment-report, viewed on 13/11/2015.

[13] Sabarimala is one of the biggest Hindu temples in India. Every year 50 million pilgrims visit this temple. phttp://www.thehindu.com/2004/01/05/stories/2004010504470400.htm, viewed on 17/11/2015.

[14] Joice K Joseph, Manikandan A.D, Karunakaran Akhil D and A.P Pradeepkumar, Pilgrim Governance and Environmental Sustainability: A Case Study of Sabarimala Pilgrim Destination, Kerala, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Pradeepkumar_Ap2/publication/293808523_PILGRIM_GOVERNANCE_AND_ENVIRONMENTAL_SUSTAINABILITY_A_CASE_STUDY_OF_SABARIMALA_PILGRIM_DESTINATION_KERALA/links/56bb5df208ae2d6f2013ac71/PILGRIM-GOVERNANCE-AND-ENVIRONMENTAL-SUSTAINABILITY-A-CASE-STUDY-OF-SABARIMALA-PILGRIM-DESTINATION-KERALA.pdf, viewed on 27/01/2017.

[15] Shinde A K, 'Place-making and environmental change in a Hindu pilgrimage site in India', *Geoforum* 43 (2012) 116–127

3.3. Four CSI Diocese in Kerala and their Approach to Sustainability and the Sacred



3.3.1. Malabar Diocese

Malabar Diocese comprises 191 churches and was, until recently, part of the North Kerala Diocese. Malabar Diocese is newly bifurcated from the North Kerala Diocese. It was bifurcated on 9th April 2015 during the Special Synod meeting held in Chennai. The Diocese of Malabar started functioning in the Head Office in the CSI Diocesan Office, Bank Road, Kozhikode. Basel Mission inspector Blum Hardt laid the foundation of the Basel Evangelical Mission works in India. I selected this

diocese as one of the study locations of my research by considering the ecological contributions of the churches and institutions in Calicut, which is currently under the Malabar Diocese. In 1834 with the financial support of the German Prince William, the Basel Evangelical Mission Society sent its first three missionaries; Rev Samuel Hebich, Rev. John Lehnar and Rev. Cristoph Grener to India. In 1834, October 13, the Basel Mission missionaries landed at the coast of Calicut, and started their missionary work with their headquarters at Mangalore in South Canara.[16] The prime attention given by the missionaries was to uplift the communities socially, economically and religiously. They opened educational institutions and started printing and publications. In order to ensure food security missionaries encouraged the natives to practice cultivation, but due to the lack of interest and idleness of converts, the agricultural activities ended in failure.[17] This persuaded missionaries to withdraw from the agricultural field and to concentrate on industrial establishments.

Malabar Diocese is geographically a large diocese in Kerala encompassing the districts of Palakkad, Calicut, Malappuram, Kannur, Waynad and Kasaragod. Calicut city is a medium sized coastal city and one of the main commercial centres in Kerala, serving the whole of the northern part of the state i.e. Malabar region. The area forms part of the Western Ghats, from where many rivers originate, these include the Chaliyar, Kallayi, Kora, Poonoor and Iravanjhi rivers. Of these, the Kallai River which runs through the southern part of the city, has been the most important both culturally and historically for the city. I visited churches and institutions in Calicut, including their prime college, the Malabar Christian College. Water pollution, deforestation and waste disposal problems are the main environmental issues in the location, and the relationship between ethnic and religious communities has greatly influenced migration, forest encroachment, and conflict over land control in this area.[18]

Malabar Diocese began ecological programmes systematically from 1996 whilst their Rt. Rev. Dr P. G. Kuruvilla was appointed as the Chairperson of the CSI Synod

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[16] E.J. Edona, *The Economic Condition of Protestant Christians in Malabar with Special Reference to Basel Mission Church*, (Calicut, 1940), 16.
[17] Wilma John, 'Basel Missionum Utharakeralathinte Sambathika Navothanavum' (Mal), in Rajeev Paul Nicholas (ed) *Basel Mission Triple Jubilee Souvenir (1842-1992),* (Calicut: CSI North Kerala Diocese, 1992), 69.
[18] Marcus Moench, 1991. 'Politics of Deforestation: Case Study of Cardamom Hills of Kerala' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 26, 1991, 47-59.

Ecological Concerns.[19] During this period, Malabar Diocese had not been formed as a separate diocese. From 1996 they have been trying to conscientize their members about the need to care for God's creation as part of their mission. They propagate ecological messages through churches and educational institutions. I visited some churches and Malabar Christian College. Malabar Christian college gives admission to students from all religious backgrounds, and all of them have been trained with ecological concerns. Students are active in manifesting their ecological campus into a green campus. During the guided tour of the campus the Corporate Manager of the educations of the Malabar Diocese mentioned that the teachers and students work together in gathering ecological wisdom and formulate pragmatic dimensions together based on them. They affirm that when they promote ecological visions through different programmes all of them contribute environmentally to their local living habitat and the people who are suffering in their neighbourhood.

3.3.2. East Kerala Diocese

The second interviews were carried out in the East Kerala Diocese, which lies on the lap of Western Ghats, and spreads to the Revenue Districts of Idukki, and eastern parts of Kottayam and Eranakulam. The area consists of mountains, peaks, valleys, rivers, and evergreen forests where Dalits and Tribal communities live. Bird and wild life sanctuaries are in this area. Though this geographical area seems an ecological canvas of a creative painter, it is often prone to natural calamities like drought and landslides. Tea plantations and rubber plantations are plentiful, and commercial monocrops like cardamom are extensively cultivated on its mountain ranges. This area has the agro-climatic conditions suitable for the cultivation of plantation crops like tea, coffee, rubber, coconut, cardamom and pepper. Small-scale farmers and marginal farmers are predominant in this area. Granite hills are in the hands of land lords, and they sell it for different construction purposes with the support of government agencies. Church members are greatly worried about this. The highland region has a comparatively cold climate. In peaks above an elevation of 2400 metres the temperature at times falls down to near freezing point in the winter.[20] Forest encroachment is a major environmental problem of this area. In this area, religion is used by the mainstream churches to mislead people in connection

[19] Churchman, CSI Synod, Madras, 9 (February 1996).
[20] Brief Industrial Report on Idukki District, Prepared my Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises, Government of India (Thrichur, MSME – Development Institute).3

with the preservation of nature. Members of the East Kerala Diocese are economically weak and have very limited land to cultivate. Big landlords are members of the mainline churches, and with the support of their church leaders, they protest against the "Kasthurirangan Report," which is produced by the central government of India to protect the biodiversity of the Western Ghats. Moreover, small-scale farmers face a lot of problems in this area due to climate change.

In 1848 Henry Baker Jr met a group of Hill Arayans from Kottayam when some members of this community visited him at his missionary quarters in Pallam.[21] Henry soon realised that they needed a leader who could save them from the hands of dominant castes and give them education. They asked him to visit their village and to open a school for them. Although he was interested in them, he could not go, because he realised they did not need Christianity but a protector. Moreover, the journey to their village was extremely dangerous involving travel through dense forest, where Malaria and Cholera were rife.[22] Baker writes, "their villages are often lovely spots, generally in the ravine not accessible to elephants, near to some gushing rivulet falling over rocks, and surrounded by gigantic trees and palms, rarely at a less elevation than 2000 or 3000 feet above the sea."[23] They were largely uncivilised and lived in fixed abodes on the slopes of the mountain ranges.[24] They were asked to pay certain amounts of money to the Brahmins but few had worked on the farms which belonged to the landlords living on the plains.[25] They had no other option but to leave their own fertile land, which was subsequently taken by the Brahmins, and move to the plains. Moreover the poor Mala Arayans were asked to work differently for the landlords and the princely state. They were asked to pay agricultural tributes to the Kings and were asked to catch wild elephants.[26] Their environmental consciousness was being exploited by the landlords. All these matters forced them to seek help from Christian Missionaries from the West. They hoped that

[21] J. W. Gladstone, Protestant Christianity and People's Movements in Kerala: A Study of Christian Mass Movements in in Relation to Neo-Hindu Socio-Religious Movements in Kerala - 1850-1936 (Trivandrum: Seminary Publications, 1984). 14-16
[22] Henry Baker, *The Hill Arrians of Travancore and the Progress of Christianity Among Them* (London: Wertheim Macintosh & Hunt, 1862), 11
[23] Henry Baker, *The Hill Arrians of Travancore and the Progress of Christianity Among Them*, 7.
[24] Travancore Census Report, 1991, Part 1, 352.
[25] Henry Baker, Report for the Year 1854, The Church Society Missionary Record, 1855, 253.
[26] Henry Baker, *The Hill Arrians of Travancore and the Progress of Christianity Among Them*, 7.

by having a strong relationship with the English missionaries their social backwardness and all injustices could be put to an end.

The Hill Arayans/Mala Arayans frequently visited Baker requesting his help and he soon learnt that there were 800 to 900 Hill Arayans who had expressed their willingness to embrace Christianity. Baker could not ignore the strong plea of the elder of the Hill Arayans, who said that although they had enough rice to eat, they did not know what was right, would die like wild animals and be buried like dogs. They wanted to worship God and nobody should suppress this.[27] Baker could not ignore their heart-breaking plea and decided to visit them. Baker's initial work was the promotion of education among Mala Araya communities. Along with this plan he tried to steer them towards sustainable living and towards this end, on many occasions missionaries bought land and gave it to the local Christian communities to cultivate. For the Mala Arayan tribes, cultivation and the careful maintenance of the land helped enable them to preserve the biodiversity of their local environment. For them careful maintenance of the land was a reaffirmation of environmental consciousness as they had a long history of having a sacred approach to nature.

As an expression of Christian stewardship, the East Kerala Diocese started thinking about conserving nature. In an organised way the diocese began its ecological programmes influenced by the Kerala Regional Youth Movement's theme of the year 1992: "Good News to All Creations." The Most Rev. Dr K. J. Samuel who was the Bishop of the diocese initiated a variety of programmes within the diocese to make people conscious of preserving the planet and caring for nature. All programmes were organised at local parish levels and district (deanery) level. This diocese is immensely blessed with the gifts of nature. The geographical area of the diocese consists of green mountains, peaks, valleys, rivers, deciduous and evergreen forests, wild sanctuaries and hill stations. The diocese has eco-origins and eco-concerns. Their ecological activities are concentrated in three areas: environmental education in educational institutions, Eco-awareness programmes at community level, and formation of action groups and community networks for implementing programmes locally.[28] Henry Baker College, Melukavu, a prime education centre pioneers the effort of environmental education in the diocese.

[27] Henry Baker, *The Hill Arrians of Travancore and the Progress of Christianity Among Them*, 12
[28] Report of the Ecological Concerns Committee of the East Kerala Diocese, 2002.

“Green your campus – green your mind” was a slogan cultivated in the college from 1992.

The majority of the members of the diocese are currently facing an environmental issue which is related to a commission by the Central Government of India. The Hill zone in the diocesan area is part of the Western Ghats, which is currently considered an ecologically sensitive area. In order to save the biodiversity of this region, the government has taken a serious step by appointing different commissions. There are different perspectives held by different communities, which are for the commission and against. I have explained this issue in detail while describing Christian ecological approach to environmental justice and environmentalism of the poor.

3.3.3. Kollam – Kottarakkara Diocese

My third set of interviews were conducted in the Kollam – Kottarakkara Diocese. I interviewed eight people from this diocese. It is a newly bifurcated diocese from the South Kerala Diocese. Geographically this area is diverse with jewelled lakes, rolling plains, mountains, rivers, sea and also dense forest. Its diocesan office is located in Kollam, which is 71 kilometres from Thiruvananthapuram, the capital city of Kerala. Kollam is drained by three west flowing rivers, the Achenkovil, Kallada and Ithikara, all originating in the eastern hilly region. These rivers together with their tributaries exhibit a dendritic pattern of drainage. Achankovil, Ayirur, Ithikkara, Kallada, Pallikkathodu and Vamanapuram are the major water sheds of Kollam. The Kallada River, originating in the Western Ghats drains and flows through the Diocesan area, eventually reaching the Ashtamudi backwaters near Kollam. Once Kollam was blessed with a wide variety of natural vegetation, but due to human intervention this diversity is now confined to small pockets in the eastern part of the district (Chattopadhyay, 1985).

The majority of the members of this diocese are from a socially and economically weaker section. Missionaries from London Missionary Society (LMS) started mission programmes as part of the propagation of the gospel from the1890s. The prime concern of the LMS missionaries was to ensure social security and sustainable living means. In order to achieve this aim LMS missionaries bought a piece of land and began to cultivate agricultural crops. Mr. Osborne a vibrant and

active LMS missionary wrote, “in a few of our congregations, a few Christians are now in possessions of small portions of land, upon which they live, and largely depend, for their livelihood. This new condition of life does not deliver them from hard work and many difficulties, but it gives them an independence and a social status which, under old conditions, they could never have enjoyed, so that the gradual improvement here and there of some of our people is in itself an encouragement and a hope for others.”[29] Missionaries taught the converted Christians to use their land by preserving biodiversity of their local environment. Barren land was utilised by planting trees and keeping rain water within their land. During my fieldwork I observed big trees in the church compounds as well as in all educational and medical institutions of the dioceses.

I found that all rural parishes are surrounded by big trees and well maintained with flowering and ornamental plants. Some churches have large areas for cultivating land. Since their ancestors had been living in line with the agrarian system there had no issue in saying that nature is sacred. The compound of the CSI Bible College for Women, Attingal is a prime example of inculcating eco-spiritualty to the students, churches and the society at large. Sister Christeena, who was a student and currently a theology teacher of the Bible College arranged a campus tour for me during my visit and explained in detail about the way she was taught by the LMS missionaries of the ecological concerns and the spiritual relationship between human beings and God’s creation. She recollected sweet memories of the student days at this institution with her British missionaries. She said students were taught about the ecological values of nature and showed that vision by planting trees in the campus and keeping the environment clean. She said that this practice still continue in her ministerial life. With much joy, she said that since this campus is a green campus even non-Christians who come to this campus consider it a sacred place. She showed me some coins in the campus adjacent to the motor-way, which were thrown by people who consider God to dwell in the campus.

The idea that nature is sacred is well connected and understood in the mission of the local parishes of the Kollam – Kottarakara Diocese. The communities who were culturally learned and theologically catechised about the preservation of nature is expressed in their environmental engagements. However, at the same

[29] Report of the LMS Missionaries, The One Hundred and Ninth Report, 1904, 219.

time, the concept of environmental sustainability and sacred was found as a problematic theme among the members of CSI Mangalapuram parish. I realised this theological issue when I visited the English India Clays Limited (EICL) and interviewed two members of CSI Mangalapuram parish who are working in EICL. My interview with them gave substantial evidence to know why in India the subject of poor come first when environmental discussions are initiated. I understood that there are many parish members working in the mining company to look after their families. They know that what they currently do is not an ecologically friendly job. They revealed to me that before this, there was no other option to get a job, take care of their family members and come out of their huge economic burden. Their social and economic position has forced them to be silent and carry these heavy burdens on their shoulders. Their views compelled me to seriously look at the discussions of environmentalism of the poor.

3.3.4. South Kerala Diocese

My fourth set of interviews were undertaken in the South Kerala Diocese, which is located in the Thiruvananthapuram district. Geographically Thiruvananthapuram is divided into three geographical regions, Highlands, Midlands, and Lowlands. Including small congregations South Kerala Diocese has 700 churches in this area. Its headquarters are at Palayam LMS Compound, which is at the heart of the city. This is the biggest diocese of the Church of South India in terms of members. Socially and culturally, Travancore (the old name of the southern region of Kerala and Tamil Nadu) was under the clutches of caste discrimination when LMS missionaries began their mission activities. Untouchability prevailed during this period and the women from lower castes were not allowed to cover their breast. William Tobia Ringeltaube, the pioneer protestant missionary and the first LMS missionary wrote about it saying, “my timid companions, however, trembled at every step, being now on ground altogether in the power of Brahmans, the sworn enemies of the Christian name.”[30] The first Christians were from lower castes and had been facing atrocities from high caste communities. Rev. John Abbs, an LMS missionary

[30] Quoted in J. W. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity and People’s Movements in Kerala 1850-1936* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1984), 60.

from England wrote that the people who lived in Travancore were the lowest classes in India and were generally slaves of the soil.[31]

The concept of the sacred was understood by the converted Christian from the context of social pollution, which persuaded the lower caste communities in Travancore to accept Christianity based on two grounds: freedom in the new religion (Christianity) and fear of the demons.[32] It had been propagated during those days that demons dwell in the temples of lower castes. One of the converts' testimony shows how beliefs of the lower castes were being used to enslave the sacred understanding of the lower castes. A converted Christian said, "I and my family feared devils and made vows and offerings"[33] The groves adjacent to such temples were not considered as sacred groves, rather the groves of the temples of the Brahmans were considered sacred. Christianity offered strength and power to the oppressed communities to fight for their right to existence and redefine sacred discourse.

Abbs' account of the ecological landscape of the South Travancore region portrays an ecological canvas which marks the ground towards the conservation nature. Abbs wrote,

> In our first journeys we confined our travels to the villages lying at the foot of the mountains, and after passing over wide-spreading plains, crossing boggy and saturated fields, fording streams which descended from the hills, and ascending rocky eminences which were almost perpendicular, we came to a dense and extensive forest, through which it was necessary to cut our way with hooks and hatchets which we had borrowed from the villages. In some places recent travellers had indeed left a path sufficiently wide for one individual to pass along singly…As far as the eye could reach, we were encompassed by miles of wild spontaneous vegetation, habitations of reptiles, where serpents lay, where the fox, the Woolf, and the boar were common, and where also the tiger had certainly abided. Scattered at the distance of about five miles from each other were villages or small communities of people, who, either by themselves or ancestors, had cleared out land from the surrounding jungles, and were living in peace and apparent comfort, unconscious of the habitable world beyond them.[34]

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[31] John Abbs, Twenty-Two Years of Missionary Experience in Travancore (London: John Snow & Co., Paternoster Row, 1870), 150.
[32] J. W. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity and People's Movements in Kerala 1850-1936* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1984), 95.
[33] Gunamudayan (Reader), quoted in John Cox to Tidman, Letter, MS, 17, 1849, TR – IL, Box 4, F1, JD, CWM.
[34] John Abbs, Twenty-Two Years of Missionary Experience in Travancore, 91-92.

He described the community living there as 'simple and children of nature.' He was very keen in preserving the green nature as it was, and made steps to convert the barren lands as a land of biodiversity.

I initiated a shelter (Hope House – for orphans) in the mission compound of Cheruvarakonam, Parasala in 2002 with the financial support a retired couple from Newcastle, UK. This mission compound is still rich in biodiversity with big trees. This compound is the only place in Parasala constituency where wild rabbits, mongoose, foxes, etc are living. Abbs reveals about the condition of the land before they occupied and after. "The spot on which the mission buildings were erected was originally in the possession of Shannars; the higher part of it, on which the bungalow now stands, had not been cultivated for many years……The success which followed our attempts to build and form gardens induced many of the heathen to give an attention to the claims of our religion."[35] Today this compound encompasses a big parish, a Law College, College of Higher Education, Higher Secondary School, Tailoring School, Hostels for boys and girls and an orphanage (Hope House); and is kept as a green campus.

The story of the formation of the concept of the sacred in the life and mission of the church is indissolubly tied with their cultural practices and Christian ethical principles such as care for people and land, and respect to nature. The home gardens of Christians manifest the religious perspective of care for nature and fellow beings. I found this mode of thinking and practice whilst I interviewed some Christians at Foster Memorial Church, Vellarada. Their praise and worship, liturgies and rituals reveal respect to nature, and justice concerns reflect a sustainable approach to a harmonious life of all living and non-living beings.

The meaning of a scared approach to environment is directly connected with care for nature. Historically, in Kerala, the Christian approach to care for nature laid a strong foundation upon a situation where nature had been conveniently approached by Hindu religious traditions. Abbs shares a story which was orally transmitted from one generation to another, that says that a sacred approach without the practice care for nature and the poor is anti-ecological. Abbs wrote in 1870 about a place called Pareychaley,

[35] John Abbs, Twenty-Two Years of Missionary Experience in Travancore, 139.

> Many years ago this place was an entire jungle; and was called Paria-chaley, on account of its being inhabited chiefly by the low caste of Pariah. A woman of this caste, in going to cut firewood one day, accidently caused the edge of a sharp instrument to touch a rock, which to her astonishment immediately began to bleed like a human being. Alarmed and surprised by the at the singular occurrence, she went and told her husband, who communicated the fact to a learned Brahmin, who saw in it the indication of a divine manifestation. The intelligence being conveyed to the Rajah, he commanded a temple to be erected over the stone whence the blood issued; a street was soon formed for the residence of Brahmins, the jungle was gradually cleared away, and the place became in some degree civilized.[36]

Environmental writers have discovered that in many places in Kerala sacred jungle sites were done away with due to religious occupation by Brahmins and other high caste communities. I visited the above-mentioned place with the help a of local political leader who knew each corner of the Pareychaley (today this place is known as Parasala) village. We found a major Hindu temple surrounded by some tiny temples of different gods. Adjacent to this temple there are big buildings of high caste Hindu communities and some coconut trees.

3.4. Kani Tribal Settlement Colony in Puravimala: An Indigenous Spirituality

My next set of field work was carried out at Puravimala Tribal settlement colony, Thiruvananthapuram where Kani tribes live in tune with nature. My close observation to their location provided substantial information to explain some indigenous practices which are directly linked to ecological values. This study seriously and carefully considered the claim of K. C. Abraham that tribal spirituality nurtures an ecological relationship between human beings and nature, and builds up a human community of love and justice.[37] Keeping this claim in my mind I observed closely dwelling places and the way they follow to keep their life in sustainable ways.

The Puravimala area is located in the middle of the reservoir created by the Neyyar dam. Boating is the only one way to reach this place. Hence their social, political and geographical location is isolated from neighbouring villages. The

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[36] John Abbs, Twenty-Two Years of Missionary Experience in Travancore, 138.
[37] K. C. Abraham, 'Third World Theology: Paradigm Shift and Emerging Concerns' in M. P. Joseph (ed) *Confronting Life: Theology Out of the Context* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1995), 220.

regularity of boating service is not being marked or fixed by government authority. Although there are government transport services available in Kerala, this Neyyar water reservoir area is neglected by concerned authorities. Very often I had to wait more than thirty minutes for the boat to reach the place. A small boat was given to this community by the Panchayat. The boat has a capacity to accommodate 6-8 people, but sometimes I saw more than ten people were in the boat. Crocodiles are living in this fresh water, and this mammal sometimes attacks people when they pass by this place and take baths in the water. Aside from this dangerous issue, the journey to Puravimala by boat is interesting. The small tides of the water reflected the greeneries of the sanctuary on all my journeys to Puravimala. The floral and faunal diversity of Neyyar Wildlife Sanctuary is really noteworthy. This green location is an abode to a variety of rare, threatened and endemic species of flora and fauna of conservational importance. It is a green sanctuary having a high degree of diversity which reveals the sustained functioning of the ecosystem.

Kani tribal community is depending heavily on sanctuary forest resources for their daily sustenance. Major resources taken by this community consists of; firewood, thatch poles, care and reeds, medicinal plants, honey, resins, gum, fodder grass, manure and fish. They have been forced to change their practices such as hunter gathering and shifting cultivation and they are now restricted in the settlement colony earmarked for them.

I gave special attention to interact with people during my travel. I met members of the Kani tribal community, rubber tappers from neighbouring villages and government officials. The rubber tapping workers have bought rubber trees which belong to the tribes. In my second day of visit, while sitting in the boat I asked Parappan Kani who is an elder of this community to know why they sold their rubber trees to the non-tribal people who live outside their colony. He said painfully that until the government had brought restrictions they had freedom to consume the resources of the forest as per their need and to collect firewood bamboos to make money. He said that when the government took away their total life, rich people from outside came and took away the fruit of their agriculture. He boldly said that they would survive as long as their spirituality exists. He was not interested to explain in detail about their spirituality since there were other people listening to our conversation. However, I was given time to meet Parappan Kani for the next day. I decided to

begin my search about the indigenous meaning of the sacred from Parappan Kani's deliberation on their spirituality.

Indigenous spirituality is rooted in reverence to nature and care for nature. This ontological expression is manifested in their customs, rituals and agricultural practices. The interviewees expressed their grievances about the changes taken place due to various reasons. They understand that those changes are not only a threat to their existence but to the biodiversity of their dwelling place as well. Even in the midst of changing circumstances, they try to continue their spirituality in sustaining their life in line with the rhythm of nature by remembering their rituals and agricultural practices in the past. I have explained in detail about their sacred approach to nature and sustainable living in the fifth chapter. I have discussed the traditional environmental knowledge of Kani tribe and their approach to sustainable resource use. I have included their rituals and practices in chapter 5 to explain their strong attachment to nature and explain how they define the concept of sacred in their lives to maintain a level of sustainable living.

3.5. Nature of the Fieldwork as an Ethnographer

I gave serious attention throughout my fieldwork as a participant researcher, because I understand that participatory research methodologies are designed to incorporate local knowledge and involve local people in in all stages of research.[38] Therefore, I would argue that participatory research methodologies incorporate knowledge of cultural and social locations which are significant in the successful completion of a research linked with ecological consciousness and environmental issues. Calheiros et al. consider the discourse of local people to collect knowledge of a community. In their words, "local people can have a well-founded understanding of their environment"[39] Since local knowledge is significant in understanding the relationship between the sacred and sustainability, I carried out my fieldwork as an ethnographic researcher. Gathering local knowledge of four dioceses and Kani tribal colony is integral to the strength of this research. Local knowledge of a community in terms of their understanding of nature will help this case study to explore the

[38] Calheiros, D.F., Saidl, A.F. and Ferreira, C.J.A, 'Participatory Research Methods in Environmental Science: Local and Scientific Knowledge of a Limnological Phenomenon in the Pantanal Wetland of Brazil' *Journal of Applied Ecology*. Vol. 37, No. 4, 2000, 684-696.
[39] Calheiros, D.F., Saidl, A.F. and Ferreira, C.J.A, 'Participatory Research Methods in Environmental Science: Local and Scientific Knowledge of a Limnological Phenomenon in the Pantanal Wetland of Brazil', 684.

research question by enhancing efficiency and quality. D. F. Calheiros, A. F. Seidl & C. A. J. Ferreira suggest that local people can be consulted through all phases of the research process, including assisting in the interpretation and communication of results.[40] Local knowledge of faith communities in the four dioceses connected with their religious behaviour, rituals, festivals, worships and liturgies, and moral practices are well explored. Likewise, the local knowledge related to the ecological consciousness of the Kani tribe and their cultural, moral and ritual practices have also been explored.

An ethnographer is a participant observer who tries to represent people's perceptions within contexts.[41] The task of the ethnographer is to discover questions that seek the relationship among entities that are conceptually meaningful to the people under investigation.[42] In ethnographic research people are informants, and they are vital to eliciting needed informations. Therefore Backer calls them co-investigators.[43] He believes that informants are used productively reshape relevancy of research questions and the accuracy of researchers' interpretations and experience. By considering this fact, I tried my level best to listen carefully to all informants and all other local people even during my walk to the locations. Frake points out that "the ethnographer can listen for queries in use in the cultural scenes he observes, giving special attention to query-rich settings."[44] Understanding this fact seriously I decided to follow open-ended interview as a method to collect data based on the main and sub questions of my research. The most important benefit of open-ended questions is that the informants allow the researcher to find more than he/she expects.

I was very keen in writing issue-based memos after each interview by reflecting what I learned from the interview. As far as possible after a few interviews, I was trying to make and record comparisons among these memos. Memos are used

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[40] Calheiros, D.F., Saidl, A.F. and Ferreira, C.J.A, 'Participatory Research Methods in Environmental Science: Local and Scientific Knowledge of a Limnological Phenomenon in the Pantanal Wetland of Brazil', 685.
[41] Michael H. Agar, *Speaking of Ethnography* (London: Sage Publications, 1986).
[42] Mary B. Black and Duane Metzger, 'Ethnographic Description and the Study of Law' *American Anthropologist* 67, 6, (1965), 144.
[43] Howard S. Becker, 'The Epistemology of Qualitative Research', 1986. http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.394.7240&rep=rep1&type=pdf, viewed on 28/08/2015.
[44] Charles O. Frake, 'A structural description of Subanun religious behaviour' in Ward Goodenough (ed) *Explorations in Cultural Anthropology in Honour of George Peter Murdock* (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1964), 143.

to stimulate and record the analysts' developing thinking, including the comparisons made. Glaser argues that memo-writing will enable the researcher to conceptualise the boundaries and properties of each category and illuminate gaps in the emerging theory, thus highlighting where to sample next and for what theoretical purpose.[45] After a few interviews I began to make and record comparisons among the memos. The memo writing directed me to genuinely look at the historical connectedness of the faith communities and the tribal community to understand how their sacred traditions influence the contemporary ecological consciousness in maintaining a sustainable living relationship with nature. In this particular point of time, the religious environmental pragmatic is deeply connected with Christian thinking and practices.

Following the view of Charmaz, I wrote conceptual memos about the initial codes being developed. For me those memos were a guiding factor to explore accurately how people understand nature from their faith background, how they look at environmental issues around them, and what are the steps they take to address their environmental problems. During my visit to local parishes, educational institutions and homegardens people explained things very well which helped considerably to make conceptual memos in comparison with continued interviews. My continuous concentration of making new conceptual memos offered a set of ideas based on the concept of the sacred and its relationship with people's approach to care for their land, daily life and household. By using those memos I made comparisons between data from their location, their issues and codes in order to find similarities and differences. It was followed by raising questions to be answered in my continuing interviews. At the end of data collection and analysis from the location, I developed a tentative model of the process of employing the procedure based on the core set of focused codes and the illustrated relationship between them.

As found in the discussion of Julius William Wilson and Anmol Chaddha I examined the ethnographic data and explained empirical assumptions, and these assumptions are derived from theoretical arguments.[46] During all of my attempts for data collection, I was guided by the creation of codes and analysis of data, that directed me to decide what data to collect and where to find them in order to develop

[45] Barney G Glaser, *Theoretical sensitivity* (Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press, 1978).
[46] Julius William Wilson and Anmol Chaddha, The Role of Theory in Ethnographic Research' *Ethnography* 10 (2009), 550.

relevant theory.[47] Theory plays a significant role in ethnographic research.[48] My empirical process was grounded upon the theory that religious beliefs and values of faith communities lead to a sense of sustainable living. I gave considerable attention to follow the grounded theory building process detailed by Glaser and Strauss. These authors have extensively discussed their comparative method for developing grounded theory. According to Eisenhardt this method relies on continuous comparison of data and theory beginning with data collection, and it gives emphasis to the emergence of theoretical categories solely from evidence and an incremental approach to case selection and data gathering.[49] Theoretical sampling is an essential guiding principle of grounded theory which is significant to the development and refinement of a theory that is grounded in data.

Glaser & Strauss strongly argue that a theory developed in direct response to immediate problems under investigation would ultimately be more relevant to the studied area than any other pre-existing theory.[50] Through this grounded theory approach, this research sought to develop theories that were grounded in the data. Therefore the sampling process of my research is theoretically oriented. The sampling process is continually directed by the emerging theory, following up leads as they arise in the data and progressively focusing data collection to refine and integrate the theory.[51]

Coding is essential to the development of a grounded theory.[52] According to Charmaz "coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data. Through coding, you define what is

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[47] Barney G. Glaser and Anslem L. Strauss, Discovery *of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. (Chicago: Aldine, 1967). 45.

[48] In order to keep a proper coding process, I tried to go through the data regularly in every evenings of the same days to linking from the gathered data of that day to the ecological discourse of the faith communities and back to the other data. In my research developing theory has a central role. Developing theory has a close connection with the empirical reality which allows the development of a testable, relevant, and valid theory.
Barney G. Glaser and Anslem L. Strauss, Discovery *of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. (Chicago: Aldine, 1967).

[49] K.M. Eisenhardt, 'Building theories from case' in M. Huberman & M.B. Miles (Eds.) *The qualitative researcher's companion* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002), 7-8.

[50] Barney G. Glaser and Anslem L. Strauss, *Discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967).

[51] Barney G. Glaser and Anslem L. Strauss, *Discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. (Chicago: Aldine, 1967).

[52] Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis* (London: Sage, 2006).

happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means."[53] There were three stages in coding. In my initial coding I generated as many ideas from my early data. The second was the focused coding, in which I pursued a selected set of central codes throughout the entire data set and study. I arrived at these through reflection on which initial codes are most prevalent or important, and which contribute most to the analysis. The third stage of coding was theoretical coding. Here I refined the final categories in their theory and relate them to one another.

The initial coding process started with my first few interviews. In accordance with the collection of many data there were formation of group of codes and many initial codes. By comparing codes against codes and data against data, I distinguished the category based on their understanding of environment, their religious approach to environment and their pragmatic commitment to nature. Following the constant comparative method I produced a theoretical code, making sense of evidence and constructing knowledge. This code captured the local people's understanding on their religious and environmental experience, and their commitment to nature.

3.6. Emerging Concepts – Nature as Sacred, Nature as Body of God, and Sacred Nature as a Sign of Sustainability

My study on two different religious communities, both the Protestant Christian communities and the Kani tribal communities, have a common sacred tradition in understanding the value of nature and human responsibility to care for nature. The CSI church members, being a worshipping community affirm the sacredness of the church building, the land on which the church building stands, the land on which they cultivate, and all the living and non-living beings in the land. For them they are manifestations of the sacredness of nature, which is based on the belief that everything is created by God. Their deep faith has a resemblance with the argument of Northcott that Christianity has been shaped by a form of worship that has been profoundly nature friendly.[54] The past and the present views of the members of the church regarding care for nature is inextricably connected with their role as crofters who are committed to ecologically craft the croft.

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[53] Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis* (London: Sage, 2006). 46.

[54] Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

The liturgical involvement of the members of the church convey a new cosmology which reveals the influential nature of the everyday practice of liturgy in caring for their land and all the beings that dwell on it. The liturgical experience of Christian communities finds relevant cosmologies, and trains Christians to nurture ecological consciousness for environmental praxis centred engagements. This is possible because Christian liturgical resources are capable of reframing moral resources to challenge environmental problems.

The ecological activism of the CSI churches in Kerala is deeply linked with the principles of environmental justice. The victims of environmental problems affirm their justice concerns loudly from their struggles and faith background, which keep a profound sense of Christian ecological values and their strong foundation of sustainability advocacy. The responses to English India Clays Ltd in Mangalapuram and the Kasturirangan Commission Report from the CSI church members are to be understood as a voice rising up "from below." The voice "from below" reveals the Christic body which is manifested in the cosmic body, that is well expressed in the rituals, liturgy and Eucharist of the faith communities in Kerala. Religion can modify the human - nature relationship,[55] is the primary theme emerging from the analysis of field data, and acts as the basis in which to formulate a theology of environmental sustainability. This theme is well resonated by White with the argument that "the role of human beings is the way people understand their place in nature and the ethical implications of that role."[56] It is also understood that in religious environmental discourse ecological behaviour is conditioned by beliefs about nature and human commitment to preserve nature with justice concerns.

3.7. Conclusion

A theology for environmental sustainability emerges from the above mentioned metaphors and ecological consciousness, from which I argue that, a theology of environmental sustainability is attentive to the voice of the environmental victims who have been crafting sacred crofts by cultivating ecological concerns from faith experience. Sathianathan Clark, who has contributed to Indian subaltern communities for the purpose of formulating new relevant theologies, opines that, Theology undertakes to reflect on the dialogical activity of an inclusive religious

[55] White, *The Historical Root of Ecological Crisis*, 1967, 1205
[56] White, *The Historical Root of Ecological Crisis*, 1967, 1206.

community that continually 'names' and 'transforms' human life in the world under God. And because dialogical symbolic interaction takes place in varied contexts, theology is attentive to all kinds of voices within the community – the compiling and resisting, the constructive and disruptive, the resonant and hushed.[57] By examining ecological voices of different communities who consider nature as sacred, the next chapter is concerned with how Keralan Christians understand, promote and preserve an ecological consciousness religiously and pragmatically. The relationship between sacred places and sacred rituals is analysed with the principles of environmental activism to explain and re-present ecological ethics and Christian commitment to the care of nature.

[57] Sathianathan Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religion and Liberation Theology in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 20.

Chapter 4

Understanding the Concept of the Sacred and the Activist Centred Dimension of Religious Environmentalism

4.1. Introduction

Religious environmentalism is inseparably linked with the sacred tradition of people, sacrality of place, worship and rituals. Sacred place, rituals and liturgies clearly reveal the human commitment to environmental preservation. The sacred tradition of faith communities in Kerala has influenced them in strengthening a missiological and theological approach to respect nature and care for the earth. The spiritual view of the church is that God created the earth and the Christian responsibility is to restore God's creation through worship and missional practices. Through liturgical and missional engagement, the church can act as a creation awareness centre and equip the members to work for the quality of their local environment. The church and worship play a prominent role in creating an environmental consciousness and directing environmental activism. From the ministry of the church local faith communities receive moral and ethical resources to improve the quality of their living habitat. It is argued that Christian worship and mission of the church can do much to overcome the consequent alienation between human consciousness and the natural order, through rituals which explicitly remake these lost connections.[1] Based on this claim, in this chapter I argue that religiously centred environmental values, which are reflected in the worship of the church and rituals are the sources required to resist environmental destruction at a local level and promote environmental sustainability.

My study regarding sacred tradition of people, their worship and rituals of the CSI dioceses in Kerala, formulates several Christian environmental themes and I have used their songs, liturgy, rituals, and mission programmes to express a meaningful analysis. Places of worship, liturgies and rituals offer a better

[1] Concerning the integral relationship between worship and the patterns of life Northcott says that, "In Christian tradition the linkages of space, time and seasons to the liturgical year played a similarly important role in integrating worship with the patterns of life on earth."[1]He makes a strong claim that "in attending to the cycles of the earth, worship in Christian church can repair the human – earth relationship. Michael S. Northcott, The Environment and Christian Ethics, 1996, 321.

understanding of God's creation and pose challenges for maintaining earth-human relationships. The ecological promise of the Christian faith is manifested in the affirmation of liturgies and practices. It is revealed from the analysis that the concepts of sacred place, worship and rituals are the visible realities of religious expressions, which connect all living beings and non-living beings towards sustainable living. Caring for the earth community by seeing it to be sacred is the foundation for the formulation of Christian environmental activism and environmental theology.

4.2. The Integral value of Sacred Tradition in Building up Sacred Environment

Kerala had a strong sacred tradition connected with the environment. Travancore, which was the former name of the Princely State of Kerala, had many sacred groves which still exist in some parts of Kerala, where they are known as *kaavu*.[2] The Malaya Araya Christian community in East Kerala is a prime example of this tradition. Samuel Mateer writes in 1883 about the sacred groves where Mala Arayan tribes dwelled, "They have some sacred groves, where they will not fire a gun or speak above a truth; they have certain signs also to be observed when fixing on land for cultivation or the sight of a house, but no other elaborate religious rights."[3] The sacred groves of the Mala Arayans are generally located in the southern part of the Western Ghats and the area is an example of the phenomenon of the sacred approach to forest groves. Religious and spiritual attachments linked to forests have helped communities to practice their conservation tradition. The sacred forest groves of the Western Ghats have a long history in India regarding care for forest resources. Local communities considered many of the forest groves in the tropics to be sacred.[4] Studies reveal that there are between 100,000 and 150,000 sacred forests in India, the largest number of sacred forests in the world, many of which are protected in connection with the religious or spiritual beliefs of local communities.[5] All sacred forest groves are associated with gods and goddesses,

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[2] Rich Freeman, 'Gods, Groves and the Culture of Nature in Kerala' *Modern Asian Studies* 33 (1999), 257–302.
[3] Samuel Mateer, *Native life in Travancore 1835-1893* (London : W.H. Allen & Co,1883), 77
[4] Shonil A. *Bhagwat* & Claudia *Rutte,* 'Sacred groves: potential for biodiversity management', *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, 2006, 4 (10), 519–524.
[5] Kailash C. Malhotra, Yogesh Gokhale, Sudipto Chatterjee, & Sanjeev Srivastava, S, *Cultural and Ecological Dimensions of Sacred Groves in India* (New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2007).

which gave communities a religious faith that their gods and goddesses would protect them, their dwelling places and the local forests.[6]

Mala Arayans held a pre-eminent position among the tribal communities in Kerala. Mateer's historical account shows that they held hundreds of acres of land which fully engaged the people in agriculture. Harvest festival was their prime event which often lasted for six months, beginning in the month of Chingam, a month in the Malayalam Calendar. Mateer writes, "The Arayans are rich, being large cultivators of the hill slopes, which they clear of jungle in the dry season and sow during the rains, giving them an abundance of rice."[7] He observed the fact that they never killed an ant, which was noted by him as a testament of Mala Arayans and their environmental consciousness.[8]

They built their houses generally on high ground mostly by the side of a stream, and used jungle wood poles, bamboos, reeds and long grass for construction. Their huts, however, did not have windows, and so were very hot during the summer heat and they were also constantly safeguarding their family and crops from the threat of attack from wild animals. Iyer explains that they built anamadam in trees (a small wood house in a tree), with a ladder providing access up to it. They took shelter in them during the night and drove off wild elephants by shouting "Ayyappa". They stored the harvests, chiefly paddy and tapioca, in the anamadam.[9] Their buildings were designed with sustainable concerns for their local geographical and climatic environment. They used stones and mud as the main raw materials for wall construction which was about two feet high. Some Malai Arayans used locally available forest resources, to make windows and doors, and bamboo mats were used for sitting and sleeping. Rev. Samuel Mateer's account provides us with an eco-friendly image of a house in that, "Many of their houses are good sustainable substantial erections of wood and stone, built by workmen from the plains"[10]

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[6] M.G Chandrakanth, M.G Bhat & M.S Accavva, Socioeconomic changes and sacred groves in South India: protecting a community-based resource management institution, *Natural Resource Forum* 2004, 28, 102–111.
[7] Samuel Mateer, *Native life in Travancore 1835-1893, 78.*
[8] Samuel Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore 1835 - 1893*, 73
[9] L.A.K Iyer, The Travancore Tribes and Castes (Trivandrum: Govt. Press, 1937), 178.
[10] Samuel Mateer, *Native life in Travancore 1835-189*, 77

Marginalized communities in Travancore were generally slaves who had been directly linked with the land.[11] East Kerala Diocese, Kollam Kottarakkara Diocese and the South Kerala Diocese were in the region of Travancore during the period of Christian missionaries from the West and the people in Travancore were welcoming communities. W. S. Hunt writes about the Travancore state in 1924, "We are in Travancore and that lovely and lovable land is at its loveliest. The south-west monsoon has blown and rained itself out. It has cooled the air and left the whole land robed in green – vivid green of rice-fields, gentler green of hill-slopes, dark green of groves."[12]

People who are the descendants of the hill living communities still consider nature with reverence. For them nature protects and feeds them and so care for nature is part of their daily life. They like to relate environmental concern with their religious beliefs. Cecily, a strong social activist and a member of the East Kerala Diocese revealed the root of her strong sacred tradition which empowered her to develop an ecological consciousness in connection with her Christian faith. She said that, "by keeping my tradition in mind I used to think and make others aware to keep the creation alive in all its beauty as it's been a gift given by God. So that kind of thought still prevails in my mind and work."[13] P. G. George, a farmer who practises organic farming and belongs to the EKD has a strong ecological foundation within his tradition. He relates his ecological tradition with his religious understanding regarding the care for nature. He said that,

> I have learnt and have been taught by the Word of God that man and woman are made from the earth and how we have been given the duty to take care and keep it in the beauty that God created. I have also been told about Adam and Eve and how they were placed in the garden to take care of the trees and birds. This becomes a responsibility not only for Christians but to other faiths too. This has been my ideology as I do my work on the farms.[14]

Sacred tradition is expressed here as a fundamental experience, which reconnects all dimensions with spiritual and cosmic experiences. This faith related experience provides a starting point for a new sense of living.[15] The faith experience which is

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[11] John Abbs, Twenty-Two Years of Missionary Experience in Travancore (London: John Snow & Co., Paternoster Row, 1870).
[12] W. S. Hunt, *India's Outcastes: A New Era* (London: CMS, 1924), 1
[13] Cecily, interviewed on 22/07/2015
[14] P. G. George, interviewed on 22/07/2015
[15] Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 74-75.

connected with a particular geographical and cultural location has immense value in explaining cosmic knowledge and ecological consciousness.

4.3. Religion Considers Ordinary Places to be Sacred and Encourages Ecological Consciousness

The church building and its land properties represent a sacred image. Both materials inside the church and all other living and non-living objects of nature are considered sacred. The members of the church consider their church to be the dwelling place of God, and therefore, for them, their church is qualified to be sacred. Since the church building is holy, they keep it and the compound clean and people remove their shoes at the doorstep of the church building before they enter. They also maintain small gardens and grow several varieties of trees. It is a fact that the church is indissolubly tied with the life of the protestant Christians in Kerala. They need a church to worship regularly where they can settle down in their life. Saju Benjamin, an ordained minister of the CSI Malabar Diocese in Kerala, explained how his diocesan communities founded churches in hilly areas. He said,

> in this hill area people have migrated from distant places and have settled down here. Even before they built their house they tried to build a church first. Their belief is that if they build the church it will be a symbol for their spiritual development, and it would help them to worship God along with all creations.[16]

Most of the Christian migrants wanted to make their dwelling place a sacred site because they believe that God is journeying with them and God would bless their agriculture, the land and all the living beings. I could see many churches in the hilly areas, and the church goers reverently protect the hill from soil erosion and do organic farming.

Caring for nature is a sacred response to people who consider church to be a sacred centre. Titus Harrison, an active evangelist of the Kollam – Kottarakara Diocese gave me a brief explanation about the land properties of local parishes in his diocese. His details point out that their faith centred understanding of nature and the ministry of the church is environmentally linked. He said,

> in my diocese some churches have small land properties and some parishes have large land properties. These land properties are generally protected by the members of the local parishes under the supervision of the ministers. It is

[16] Saju Benjamin, interviewed on 10/07/2015.

> a fact that members of the parishes are fully committed to protect such properties, because we consider that they are God's creations, and they are sacred as well. There are different varieties of fruit trees, planted by the members of the church.[17]

Braivin Camly, a member of a local parish of South Kerala Diocese said that her church provided her with many opportunities to learn about God and all creation. She considers the church, its compound and all the living and non-living beings in the church grounds to be sacred. She said, "the church compound including trees, flowering plants and other non-living things are sacred because -they all are the creations of the God Almighty."[18] Her deep relationship with the local parish has immensely identified holiness of the worshiping place, and still lives in tune with the sacredness of the holy sanctuary. In expressing her faith experience, she said that,

> I believe that church building and the place surrounded to it are sacred. Whenever I am going to church, I can feel the healing touch of God, the presence of Holy Spirit, which make me believe in the purity of the church building and its premises. Since I consider them as sacred, I always have the motivation to care for nature. I can love trees and flowering plants. Whenever I see flowering plants, I can remember God's wonderful creation and praise him for his marvellous doings.[19]

Her approach to all living and non-living beings has been shaped by her understanding of God, God's dwelling place (holy sanctuary) and all His creations. I would argue that reorienting people to see their place as a sacred entity is fundamental to the preservation of the environment.

A place qualifies to be sacred with the revelation of spirituality. Mircea Eliade's extensive study on the sacred and profane provides a deeper understanding of how the concept of the sacred is linked with the members of the church and their approach to environmental concerns. In Eliade's words, "Every sacred space implies a hierophany, an eruption of the sacred that results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different."[20] He goes on to say that there is no need for a theophany or hierophany, even a sign is enough to indicate the sacredness of a place.[21] The Church is the sign of the relationship with God and God's creations. Therefore the spiritual landscape of the members of the

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[17] Titus Harrison, interviewed on16/08/2015.
[18] Bravin Camly, interviewed on 09/07/2015.
[19] Bravin Camly, interviewed on 09/07/2015
[20] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York and London: A Harvest/HBI Book, 1959), 26.
[21] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, 27.

church is linked with the cosmic understanding of God. Their faith in God, which is connected with cosmic knowledge, inspires them to dwell in sacred places. According to Eliade, "Religious man's profound nostalgia is to inhabit a "divine world," and that his house shall be like the house of God, as it was later represented in temples and sanctuaries. In short, this religious nostalgia expresses the desire to live in a pure and holy cosmos, as it was in the beginning, when it came fresh from the Creator's hands."[22] Similar views were expressed among the members of CSI churches who believe that God dwells in holy sanctuaries thus making the landscape sacred.

Sacralisation of space is an act of making a place holy with certain sacred images. Christabel P. J is an active resource person in the South Kerala Diocese, who gives lectures on ecological topics and holds the view that the earth is sacred. In her words, "all creations including trees, plants and everything on the earth are having the touch of God. Everything is sacred. We have to approach it with a sacred mind or divine mind, and we have to respect it, and we have to protect it. This kind of feeling I have when I go to the forest or when I see the natural environment."[23] The sacralisation act is performed with a profound sense of reverence which makes a place a sacred one. Saebjorg Walaker Nordeide claims that in the context of sacralisation, landscape constitutes a space - real or mythical – in which people live.[24] Based on this claim Nordeide explains that in a particular landscape an individual's life is coloured by this space, but the actions of individuals can change the landscape. Considering the changing character of this space Nordeide understands landscape as a transitive conglomerate of cognitive and cultural process. Nordeide clearly distinguishes what is sacred and what is not sacred. He does this by considering the interactions of people, nature and the concept of sacred in the light of the understanding of time and space. For him un-sacred is associated with chaos or evil.[25] In a sacred place the sacrality of a site is perceived and its social functions are revealed. According to Nordeide,

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[22] Mirceea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, 65.
[23] Christabel P. J, interviewed on 09/08/15.
[24] Saebjorg Walaker Nordeide, 'The Sacralization of Landscape', in Saebjorg Walaker Nordeide and Stefan Brink (eds) *Sacred Sites and Holy Places: Exploring the Sacralization of Landscape Through Time and Space* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2013), 3.
[25] Saebjorg Walaker Nordeide, 'The Sacralization of Landscape', in Saebjorg Walaker Nordeide and Stefan Brink (eds) *Sacred Sites and Holy Places: Exploring the Sacralization of Landscape Through Time and Space*, 9.

> "Sacred sites vary from permanent locations to casual and event specific sites. Whether in urban or rural settings, shrines, churches, pagodas, temples, synagogues, and mosques of established religions are dominant locations of the sacred. In addition to sacred buildings and monuments, there are sites set apart and marked off as sacred in the secular domain of a society, organized either by a social institution or by individual persons as a memorial to a significant event that has taken place there."[26]

Sacred sites reveal the sacred time of environmental values of creation which directs the worshipers to creatively respond to the sustainable needs of the living communities. Therefore I would argue, as John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow say, ordinary spaces can be converted into sacred spaces and reverence and protection of nature can be sustained there.[27] Considering an ordinary place as a sacred space is essential in a faith community in order to sustain environmental awakening. However, there are church compounds which are facing environmental threat due to developmental activities, such as the construction of offices, shopping complexes, commercial halls, etc. Jain Hubert remarks that sacred sites throughout the world are under threat due to commercial developments such as the construction of roads and bridges, shopping centres, housing and industries.[28] But, as a response to the conversion of sacred sites due to developmental activities, worshipping communities can address environmental issues through worship, rituals and pragmatic dimensions locally, and in collaboration with people of other faiths and secular communities.

4.3.1. Worship and Sacred Place

Christian worship has an environmental value since God is understood as the creator, and the creator God is worshipped along with all other creations at sacred places and sacred time. I base this argument in the light of the ecologically motivating worship services of the members of CSI churches Kerala.

Environmental concerns are predominantly part of Christian worship in the ecclesial journey of CSI churches in Kerala. Members of the congregations are spiritually attached to the regular worship services on Sundays and by their

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[26] Veikko Anttonen, 'Landscapes as Sacroscapes: Why does Topography Make a Difference:', in Saebjorg Walaker Nordeide and Stefan Brink (eds) *Sacred Sites and Holy Places: Exploring the Sacralization of Landscape Through Time and Space* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2013), 14.

[27] John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow, *Contesting the Sacred* (London: Routledge, 1991).

[28] Jane Hubert, 'Sacred Beliefs and Beliefs of Sacred' in David Carmichael, Jane Hubert & Brian Reeves (eds) *Sacred Sites, Sacred places* (London: Routledge, 1994), 9.

participation in other relevant programmes. The mission of the congregations is evolved from the collective participation of the members. For the local churches, each mission agenda is seen as part of worshipping God. Thus, the church goers' environmental understandings and concerns are formulated by different activities in their local church, such as Sunday Schools, Christian Endeavour Youth Fellowships and Women's Fellowships.

The common worship of the South Kerala Diocese on Sundays begins with the adoration of Almighty God who created all creations. The average regular attendance is about 95% in all parishes. When the second bell rings the choir and all members stand up and sing a song of adoration just before the minister invites the congregation to worship God. The 3rd song in the Song Book of the Diocese which is sung most Sundays as an adoration song, has a classical tune, which people sing with great respect. The meaning of the first four lines of this song is,

We adore the creator of the world
We adore the creator of all creations
We adore the God who created the land, sea, life, and the sky
We adore the Father who is gracious.[29]

From the beginning of the worship the congregation seeks the God who created planet Earth and all the living and non-living beings that dwell in it. They affirm that human beings live in God's world along with all other living and non-living beings. Therefore, through their worship humans share their lives with the heavens and the earth, the seas and the land, the trees and grasses, fish, birds, animals and with all fellow beings. In some churches, even before the second bell rings, the choir sing songs which give the congregations the feeling that they are worshipping the creator God and all His creations, both living and non-living beings. Such adoration songs affirm and remind the congregation that the whole of creation is God's handiwork and that they belong to God. From this affirmative and collective voice, creative thoughts emerge from the worshippers in relation to their local environment. Such songs invite the congregation to adore the creator God, examine human commitment to the preservation of planet earth and to be aware of their individual responsibility to care for nature. The meaning of one of the most popular and widely used songs that denominational churches use in their environmental programmes is;

[29] Song number 3 of the Common Worship Song Book of the South Kerala Diocese, (Thiruvananthapuram: C D Publications).

Your earth is abundant with goodness
Great wonder they are
This universe reveals your handiwork;
And it is my holy temple.[30]

The Sunday worship service, in general, is based on the Christian perception regarding the relationship between God and creation. The service begins with an invitation by the priest/evangelist by reading Psalm 100:1 which gives a spiritual feeling to the congregation that they have become part of God's family of creation as they have come to the holy sanctuary to worship with gladness. It is for this reason that the place where they are gathered becomes a sacred place. It is a call to listen to the creation praising God. Annabel Shinsel Thomas is of the opinion that,

> rather than hearing creation sing the praises of the Creator, we are seduced by the sound of our own voices proclaiming the power of the creature. We become deaf to the 'heavens declaring God's glory and the firmament of his handiwork' and mute in our own declaration of praise; for with praise comes recognition of our place within creation and of our call to care for the earth.[31]

Praising God along with all creations offers a deep sense of human response to care for the earth. Thomas argues that praising the creator God is recognition of our dwelling place within creation, and through this realization there is a call to care for the earth and one another.[32] Praising God in a sacred place gives a worshipping community liturgical consciousness about the environment and guides them to dwell along with other creations in order to maintain sustainable relationships.

The next element in the common worship service is call to worship, which is spoken by the minister; "This is the day that the Lord has made"[33] which reveals a sacred time and space and offers a holy feel. At the time of worship the image of God as creator is affirmed. This affirmation enables the worshippers to see the self-revelation of God in creation. Samuel Rayan, a prominent Catholic theologian in India argues that, "The earth is the Lords", and she rejoices in being his. She exalts before the face of the Lord, she claps her hands with her trees and her rivers, she offers her flowers and wafts her incense, and the dance of her worship never

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[30] Song Number 17, *Diocesan Youth Conference Song Book* (Trivandrum, Board For Youth Work, 1999).
[31] Annabel Shilson Thomas, *Creation Sings Your Praise* (Norwich: Christian Aid & Canterbury Press, 2010),X111.
[32] Annabel Shilson Thomas, *Creation Sings Your Praise*, X111.
[33] Call to Worship, Order of Worship Service (Trivandrum: CD Publications, 1982), 3.

ends."[34] When the service begins, the members of the congregations step into the liturgy, sensing the providence of the creator God. In the words of Northcott,

> churches are places where the divine story of salvation and hope for human life and the cosmos is declared and experienced and anticipated in worship: hope in the redeeming creator, the God who takes created embodied life into divine being, the man who dies on the tree of life in sacrifice for the life of the cosmos, and the spirit of life who not only brooded on the face of primeval waters but continues to urge the creation at every level to realise those goods of harmony and reciprocity, of-cooperation and creativity, of community and diversity, which we find reflected both in biotic and in human communities.[35]

Liturgy ritualizes nature. Liturgy, for the members of the faith community is, in the words of Peter L. Berger, 'a sacred canopy'[36] of hope for the whole creation.

Songs and Hymns enrich the spiritual realm of the worshipers. There are meaningful songs, many composed by the members of local congregations, telling of and re-emphasizing environmental and Christian ethical commitments. Sam Jacob, an ordained minister of the South Kerala Diocese composed a song which acknowledges God the creator and all creations. The congregations sing this song every Sunday as part of confessing sin since this song demands that people keep away from the wanton exploitation of the resources of nature and requires them to be committed to environmental victims. Pramod, from the Malabar Diocese, explained the importance of songs in the understanding and the propagating of Christian environmental values. He said, "there are songs that harmonize the relationship between man, God and nature. For example, songs like All things bright and beautiful, all things great and small, deepens ecological consciousness."[37] From the recent past in all Diocesan convention meetings[38] there are songs which convey Christian environmental values.

In Kerala most of the CSI churches spend more than ten minutes for intercessory prayer. Vinod Allen, an ordained minister of the Malabar Diocese explained the role of intercessory prayer in providing an environmental consciousness in the worshipers. Although the issue of global warming is not

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[34] Samuel Rayan, 'The Earth is the Lord's', in David G. Hallman (ed), *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994), 135.
[35] Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, 1996, 324.
[36] Peter L. Berger, *Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday & Company INC, 1967).
[37] Pramod, interviewed on 10/07/2015
[38] In India, particularly in Kerala irrespective all church denominations convention meeting is a major religious event, which is organized once in year in stadium or in a common place. Almost all congregation members will attend.

included in their liturgy, he adds it as one of the subjects of intercessory prayer. He said that,

> Every Sunday I lead the intercessory prayer. I always pray, we have a prayer that global warming is not included there. But I include that thing because we have this drought and famine and so on. But in that I include global warming and give them a kind of awareness, it is a global warming, how to prevent global warming, and we should do something towards that kind of thing, feeling, I try to bring in intercessory prayer.[39]

Generally congregations prefer to follow a printed version of the intercessory prayer from the litany. However today, congregations are allowed to make changes in the liturgy in order to reflect their Christian responsibilities. Moses David, an ordained minister of the Kollam – Kottarakara Diocese said that

> In the intercessory prayers today we talk only about general environmental issues or people those who have been affected generally. We use words like climate change or global warming and so on, but I believe more topics relating to environmental issues which are relevant to our immediate surroundings must be brought into our prayers to make the message more effective and meaningful.[40]

It is therefore evident that there are creative efforts from ministers to articulate environmental concerns from the scripture and include those concerns in liturgies.

Worship liturgies are powerful instruments which can be used to create an environmental consciousness and direct faith communities towards the protection of their local environment. Titus Harrison, an evangelist in the Kollam – Kottarakara Diocese, is propagating environmental ideologies extensively in his ministry which he maintains are rich enough to cultivate environmental values. He said,

> When I am worshiping God during the time of Sunday worship, my heart solely fills with the liturgical affirmation which portrays the image of the awesome universe of God, day, night, spring time and harvest, grass, trees etc. This image is a central part of our thanks giving prayer that we do every Sunday. My commitment to care for God's creations is emerging from this prayer indeed.[41]

Andre Pearson mentions that church liturgy should touch on the themes of creation if the aim of the liturgy is to engage with this significant dimension in ordinary people's lives.[42] He suggests this as a response widely felt in terms of environmental crisis.

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[39] Vinod Allen, interviewed on 10/07/2015
[40] Moses David, interviewed on 23/07/2015
[41] Titus Harrison, interviewed on 16/08/2015
[42] Andrew Pearson, *Making Creation Visible: God's Earth in Christian Worship* (Cambridge: Grove Books Limited, 1996), 12.

He recommends that, “Christians need to find more and new ways of expressing ecological concern in liturgy...it needs to be integrated within all liturgy,”[43] and maintains that it should not be relegated to occasional festivals or even only on Sundays.

The dwelling of God with his people is important to the history of worship and central to the act of making new of the order of creation.[44] Worship is an obedient response to the call of God.[45] According to Duncan Forrester, “in worship we are involved in the life of heaven, we experience in a fragmentary way the life that is to come, and we glimpse God’s purposes for everyone and for the whole of creation.”[46] Allen P. Ross states the mode of response of the worshippers in the context of the exodus worship experience of the Jews. Accordingly Ross reveals that the unanimous declaration of the worshipers about their willingness to obey God’s words is the way of response through worship experience.[47] Northcott makes a strong claim that “Christian worship can do much to overcome the consequent alienation between human consciousness and natural order, through rituals which explicitly remake these lost connections.”[48] It is well deliberated in the worship and liturgy of the CSI churches in Kerala, which inspires people to experience the sacred dimension of the relationship between the creator and all creations to cultivate environmental consciousness.

H. Paul Santmire considers liturgy to be a medium for the church to fulfil its ecological and eschatological vision. Santmire claims the church can convey a better meaning of nature through her rituals and liturgy.[49] The ecological consciousness cultivated by liturgies lays foundations of sacred thinking and practice in order to sustain the moral virtue to live in harmony with fellow beings and the environment. By deliberating liturgy as a form of ritual Santmire interprets the world of nature from the context of liturgy. He calls this mode of interpretation ‘ritualizing nature.’ In his words, ritualizing nature - “means standing within the cultural world of Christian

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[43] Andrew Pearson, *Making Creation Visible: God’s Earth in Christian Worship*, 13.
[44] Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Kegral Publications, 2006), 496.
[45] Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Kegral Publications, 2006), 178.
[46] Duncan Forrester, ‘In Spirit and In Truth: Christian Worship in Context’, in Duncan Forrester (ed) *Worship and Liturgy in Context* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 3.
[47] Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation*, 177.
[48] Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, 1996, 321.
[49] H. Paul Santmire, *Ritualizing Nature: Renewing Christian Liturgy In A Time of Crisis (*Minneapolis, MN : Fortress , *2008).*

worship and seeing what one can see as one contemplates the world of nature from that standpoint."[50] Saying liturgies with a deep sense of ecological consciousness strengthens a worshipper to increasingly step into the life of the communities with environmental values and ethical insights. Rituals play a vital role in linking liturgical affirmation of God's creation and human commitment to care for creation.

4.3.2. Rituals and Sacred Environment

Liturgical expressions of ecological concern strengthen Christian worship to carry out the mission of the church. Religious practices having fixed sequences of actions are often called rituals.[51] In the words of Northcott,

> rituals are inherited and learned behaviour patterns which represent the interaction of biophysical and cultural factors in the environmental and social construction of life both for primates and for humans. Rituals connect us to the social world and to our environment, and enable us to develop many motor and linguistic functions without which we could not live as adults, nor engage with other adults.[52]

Rituals are concerned with Christian traditions of long standing, something profoundly, promising to reveal about nature, the relationship between God and human life in nature. CSI Churches in Kerala practice some rituals which enable people to consider nature as sacred.

In the past "tree offering" was a sacred ritual practised with much reverence and gratitude in South Kerala Diocese. It continues today in rural parishes, enabling worshipers to affirm their faith that God is the creator of the earth and what they receive from the earth is sacred. Therefore, from their agricultural land they offer the best yielding tree and its fruits to God. Members of the CSI Foster Memorial Church, Vellarada in the South Kerala Diocese have offered coconut trees for the church and considered this offering a holy act. Mr. Sabu, one of the members of this church said that, "my family offered a coconut tree for God and we have brought its nuts to the church. We have not taken any single nut from that coconut tree for our personal use. The offered coconut tree is a sign of the presence of God."[53] The people who have offered coconut trees believe that because God blesses their land and crops, it

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[50] H. Paul Santmire, *Ritualizing Nature: Renewing Christian Liturgy In A Time of Crisis (*Minneapolis, MN : Fortress , *2008*).4.
[51] John R. Brown, *Religions in Practice: An Approach to the Anthropology of religion* (New York: Pearson, 2005), 43.
[52] Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, 320.
[53] Sabu DS, interviewed on 22/07/2015.

makes them holy. In practicing this sacred observance they consider that the earth belongs to God. Tree offering is a ritual which explains sacred acts and cosmological wisdom. I would argue that ecologically connected rituals are capable of framing Christian cosmologies and cultivating ecological orientation toward maintaining sustainable living relationship.

Harvest festival is an occasion for congregations to thankfully and reverently worship God by offering the best fruits from their harvests. During harvest festival day, members of the rural church bring agricultural crops from their fields. Through these offerings they affirm that what they offer to God is from their God-given property. Therefore they consider their agricultural fields as belonging to God, and reverently consider that land, water, air and all species are to be taken care of well. This approach to nature protection has been handed down from generation to generation as a spiritual commitment to the welfare of the families and the church.[54] Planting fruit trees in the church compound was also prevalent in the past. Pramod, an active member of the CSI Cathedral Church, Calicut explained the history of his congregation and told of the introduction of planting old tree saplings during harvest festival. He said, “at harvest festival, our new priest, what he has done is, he brought in tree planting.”[55] Now it has become a regular practice in the church.

“Dhannya lelam” (fruit auction) and “Christmas Lelam” are the two main ritual practices that the church continually and faithfully practices with great reverence and thanksgiving. Both ritualistic practices are an opportunity to bring agricultural crops into the church as a manifestation of giving thanks to the creator God for caring for their agriculture and protecting their cultivation from all problems. Some churches combine “Dhannya lelam” and Harvest festival together. Both practices elucidate spiritual relationship with the creator God and a hope for sustainable living. Income from both “lelams” (auctions) are used for the subsistence of the poor and destitute. A caring attitude towards the poor is a theme embedded in Christian rituals. From an analytical point of view, John Cairne’s understanding regarding the relationship between sacred and sustainability becomes significant in my deliberation. According to him, “A new relationship between humankind and earth, based on a belief that the

[54] Jyothi Isaac, interviewed on 09/08/2015.
[55] Pramod, interviewed on 10/07/2015.

planet's biospheric life support system is sacred, is needed for humanity to create planetary sustainability."[56]

Looking through the lens of Priestly tradition of the Old Testament, Gorman sees a close relationship between the Priestly view of creation and the priestly view of ritual.[57] From this finding Gorman formulates a theory of Priestly rituals in three forms; cosmic, social and cultic. He explains that "the order of the cosmos established by God, which is reflected in the order of society, and is celebrated in the order of cultic practices."[58] Rappaport and Wuthnow regard ritual as the basic social act, which takes place in a specific socio-cultural context.[59] Through practising rituals congregations affirm their faith in the creator God and God's care for all creation. This affirmation is celebrated whenever rituals are performed with environmental values.

Rituals are performed in a sacred place, and direct people to think and act according to their sacred consciousness. The sacred consciousness can be employed in non-sacred places to make them sacred with certain rituals. Eliade elucidates ritual as a means to reproduce the work of gods and explains how rituals give sacred images to the world. In the words of Eliade,

> in reality the ritual by which he (human being) constructs a sacred space is efficacious in the measure in which it reproduces the work of the gods. In order to better understand the need for ritual construction of a sacred space, we must dwell a little on the traditional concept of the "world"; it will then be apparent that for religious man every world is a sacred world.[60]

By performing rituals congregations sacredly reconsecrate the world. Moving away from Eliade's understanding of the sacred, Dianne Bergant discusses sacred rituals by connecting them with social concerns. She hopes that the sacredness centered community is a re-created community that can commit itself to issues of social and economic justice.[61] The worship in a place of assembly shapes sacredness which relates in various ways to ethics, ecology and theology.

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[56] John Carrns, Jr., 'Sustainability and Sacred values', *Ethics in Science and Environmental Politics*, 13 (2002), 15.
[57] Frank H Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual: Space, Time and Status in the Priestly Theology* (Sheffield: JSOT Press,1990).
[58] Dianne Bergant, *The Earth Is The Lord's: The Bible, Ecology, and Worship* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998). 27.
[59] Roy A. Rappaport, *Ecology, Meaning and Religion* (Richmond, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1979). 174; Robert Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order: Explorations in Cultural Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).
[60] Mirceea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, 29.
[61] Dianne Bergant, *The Earth Is The Lord's: The Bible, Ecology, and Worship*, 29.

In Christian worship liturgical elements increasingly give inspiration to justice concerns which have a social, economic and cosmic dimension. In a sacred assembly justice concerns are sung and said from liturgy in a reverential manner, which promotes the message to love one another and to care for the poor and the order of creation. In the words of Bergant, "Justice issues are constitutive of the liturgical act itself. The very makeup of the assembly and the manner in which the rite is performed reflect the degree to which justice is established."[62] Justice concerns are reflected in the form of ecological awakening among the worshipers as they involve eco-centered liturgy and rituals. Therefore I would argue that sacred space is a place for the re-creation of ecological awakening and a time of transformation for the re-creation of the world. According to Bergant,

> A return to the celebration of sacred time and the reactualization of the sacred space can be seen as a way of establishing the reign of God in our world today. Because of the constant threat of chaos (sin), this re-creation is an ongoing process. Because of human frailty and the trepidation within the human spirit, the task of transformation seems to be daunting. However, it is divine and not merely human power that is released in the world at this time of reactualization, and it is this divine power that makes re-creation of the world possible.[63]

Re-creation of the world is linked with environmental justice. Therefore, I would argue that Christian responsibility for the order of creation directs faith communities to work for social justice. Justice linked with environmental concern brings about structural and institutional change as a result of the creation spirituality covered in the performance of liturgies and rituals.

Bron Taylor, in his attempt to explain the sacredness of nature, documents a number of cases of people strengthening their relationships with nature through ritual.[64] Churches being faith communities provide powerful messages about taking care of creation through various liturgical engagements. Through liturgical engagements faith communities are being ecologically inspired and spiritually motivated to be sensitive to the environmental crisis. The liturgies which give emphasis to ecological sensitivity offer a sense of transformation toward cosmic and social implications. Liturgical and ritualistic elements of the local churches affirm their commitment to care for the environment. The Church is a place for bringing changes

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[62] Dianne Bergant, *The Earth Is The Lord's: The Bible, Ecology, and Worship*, 30.
[63] Dianne Bergant, *The Earth Is The Lord's: The Bible, Ecology, and Worship*, 30.
[64] Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

spiritually and ethically by conveying a due sense of urgency to transform the current way humans approach living and non-living beings. This transforming dimension of environmental consciousness leads towards a sustainable way of life for all living and non-living beings of planet earth because it directs communities to evolve an environmental pragmatism.

4.3.3. Re-Presenting Ecological Ethics and Christian Commitment to Care for Nature

The role of religion as an environmental guiding agency has significant meaning in theoretical and pragmatic dimensions because, "religion serves the function of strengthening social solidarity by communicating specific ideas and sentiments, and by regulating and strengthening social relationships."[65] The worship and sacramental tradition of the church and its teachings have created a strong foundation in the ecological expressions of the dioceses. The sacred traditions in the life of the ancestors of the members of the churches in the dioceses of East Kerala and South Kerala have considerably embrace Christian views about nature. The members of the South Travancore Protestant Christian tradition (LMS) had used their sacred tradition in connection with their traditional agriculture practices mainly nurturing the biodiversity of local villages by cultivating Palmira trees and Tamarind trees and paddy. When they accepted Christian faith the practice of cultivation became a means for ensuring sustainable living of their members and care for their local environment.[66] The same traditions have been nurtured in the Mala Araya Christian communities in the East Kerala Diocese. The Mala Arayans' environmental consciousness is testament to the legacy of their ancestors who had kept sacred groves as part of their religious life. For them nature was sacred. They considered that it had a sacred character, and was therefore a manifestation of God, to be treated with respect and reverence. This sacred character is revealed in their social and religious life.

The Mala Arayans' religious knowledge regarding nature is highly manifested in their response to environmental concerns. Their critical approach to the Kasthurirangan Report (2013) springs from their religious understanding of nature.

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[65] John R. Brown, *Religions in Practice: An Approach to the Anthropology of religion* (New York: Pearson, 2005), 16.
[66] John Abbs, *Twenty Two Years of Missionary Experience in South Travancore*, 180-217.

These people, converted to Christianity, have similar environmental values as their ancestors had in the past. From the point of their faith background they partake in the protest against the Kasthurirangan Report. Their faith centred environmental consciousness makes them think and act in accordance with their need for survival and they hold on to the strong belief that religion could address the environmental crisis.

Ecological consciousness is understood as a sacred act which directs faith communities to hold reverence to nature and care for the earth. Jaison Joseph pointed out the guiding role of Christian worship and its influence upon faith communities to respect nature and protect it by realising our relationship with the nature. He maintains that human connection with nature should be strengthened saying, "the connection which I meant was the people showing care and reverence to creation and using it according to how we see it in the worship instructions. In my opinion as in India the land is seen 'Amma' (mother) and when the biological image of our mother is kept in us how can we leave our mother unprotected and not well taken care of."[67] Religious commitment to care for nature is indissolubly tied with spirituality nurtured by worship and mission programmes.

Saji Thadathil, a Marxist political leader and a member of the church said that "religions have a larger role and the religions have played it by bringing out more of the focus to the saving of creation and human-kind. Now the people in the CSI churches are going to the conventions and seminars some even leaving the political arena and moving thus taking the message to the youths too."[68] This is because they have trust in the mission of the church and the message coming out of the church. Religion matters when they look at their daily life in connection with their relationship with their local living habitat. Religion is expressed here as a relational centre which connects the life of the Mala Araya communities and their environment.

For Christian communities the land and the local environment is God given, and as such, must be well cared for. P. G George explained that human commitment to ecological concerns is a spiritual act, which includes both reverence to nature and care for creation. In his words, "It is the responsibility of every human to take care of the earth and the things given to us. This responsibility has to be taken seriously because only then will God give rewards for the way we dealt with the produce from

[67] Jaison Joseph, interviewed on 22/07/2015
[68] Saji Thadathil, interviewed on 22/07/2015

the earth."[69] P. G. George is a farmer in East Kerala Diocese who cares for his small farm and regards it as God given.

P. G. George has a beautiful farm. I visited him one day during my field work. After an hour interview he conducted a guide tour of his farm. He follows an intercropping system on his farm and because it was raining I observed the water harnessing system he has adopted to keep rain water in his property. He has many small ponds, through which he makes sure that the flora and fauna on his property always have water. He maintains the biodiversity of his land by considering it as the Garden of Eden. He tries to produce healthy crops for his village at low cost. This vision sustains his thinking regarding the sustainable environment and leads him to convey this message to other farmers, Christians and other faith communities during his free time in the streets.

I found that a Christian approach to nature is manifested in the mission of the church. The religious thinking regarding nature has been pragmatically designed by the CSI dioceses in Kerala to lead Christians to uphold an ecological consciousness in their religious and daily life. It is understood from the missiological expression of the churches that the sacred approach to nature leads to environmental activism.

4.4. Defining Environmental Activism: Ecclesiological and Institutional Mission Paradigms

Environmental activism was brought into environmental discussions as a movement in the early 1990s. In 1994 the World Council of Churches Central committee approved a policy statement addressing global warming and climate change calling upon churches to "recognise the challenge to the life and witness of Christians that the crisis from accelerated climate change presents; to reinterpret Christian responsibility toward creation and respond in faith and action to the peril in their own situation" and "work in partnership with peoples of all living faiths and traditions, and with governments and non-governmental organisations."[70] During the 1990s there was a series of ecological awareness programmes among the youth in the CSI churches in Kerala, which provided a strong mission foundation through worship and environmental activities. All churches worked closely with the diocesan and synod level environmental activities. It is noted that now the churches at the

[69] P. G. George, interviewed on 22/07/2015
[70] Sign of Peril, Test of Faith: Accelerated Climate Change, WCC publications, 42

local level reflect ecological concerns through different activities to benefit their environment.

Christian environmental concern has a close relationship to the concern for social justice, which appears in the attitudes and behaviour of the members of the church. This approach is seen in the environmental ministry of the CSI churches in Kerala. Since the mission structures of the church are engaging in their communities with a role of activist practices, I intend to call the activist model a praxis centred engagement.[71] The praxis centred (activism) dimension of environmental concerns are mainly organized on an ecclesial level and educational institutional level.

4.4.1. Ecclesiological Environmental Activism

Environmental activism has emerged in the CSI churches as a missional agenda over a period of twenty-five years. Although there had been ecological thinking and practices previously, these engagements had not formed part of the subject matter of study in Christian education programs. During this time the Kerala United Theological Seminary, a theological institution of the CSI churches in Kerala, introduced a syllabus based on ecology, through which an attempt was made to give emphasis to environmental concerns for theologically trained Ministers.[72] Along with this attempt ecological awareness was propagated through church journals (Chraisthava Deepika, Sabhamithram) inspiring people to present pro-environmental concerns to secular communities by being involved in local environmental issues.

Christian teaching, from the pulpit, to youth fellowships, women's fellowships and children's fellowships provided a substantial background for the praxis centred ministerial dimension of the church. Worship and teaching are valued in the ecological learning process to put them into the daily life of the church goers. Moses P. David said from his experiential level that;

> The Church is placing a strong emphasis on taking care of creation rather than destroying or making use of it illegally. During Ecological Sunday worship, the preaching and songs in one way emphasis more on making people aware that God has given us this creation and we should be stewards of it every day. The message has been passed to youths on a regular basis, and the youth carry out their ecological responsibilities in the church and

[71] Karen Frostig Newton relates activism with praxis in explaining radical modes of engagement. Karen Frostig Newton, 'Arts Activism: Praxis in Social Justice, Critical Discourse, and Radical Modes of Engagement', *Art Therapy* 28:2 (2011) 50-56

[72] Vachanadhara (Sermon Outlines), KUTS, (1995-1997).

> society actively. What they learn from the church, are been put into practice, such as tree planting, rain water harvesting, etc.[73]

The Christian message about caring for creation is evident through small initiatives such as planting tree saplings. Koshy George spoke of how his local parish carries out an environmental ministry as part of caring for their local environment. He said, “the planting of small trees both within and outside the Church compound is being done now. This shows that the churches are taking care of the environment.”[74] Christian environmentalism provides pragmatic inspiration for us to regard the local environment a home for all the living and non-living beings.

Christian views on environmental concerns have had an immense influence upon the members of the church. Mr. Cherian who is serving as the Propertied Board Manager of the Kollam – Kottarakara Diocese voiced his opinion clearly with strong environmental commitment. He said that, “It is my opinion that before we cut a tree we should plant two trees, and preserve the existing trees to keep the sustainable relationship between human beings and nature.”[75] As part of the observation of World Environment Sunday, CSI Calicut Cathedral church celebrated the day with the theme "People Connecting to Nature." Youth members distributed packets of organic vegetable seeds to be planted for the kitchen garden and members of the Golden Age Fellowship were to give a cash award to the best vegetable garden after three months. Sunday school children joyfully joined in the "bare foot monsoon walk... ", and the Men’s Fellowship began their exemplary work in planting and maintaining the garden at the West Hill Cathedral Cemetery.

T. I. James inspired youth members of his church teaching them about ecological concerns and encouraged them to plant trees. The trees which were planted 15 years ago are now used as a shelter for poor people, as well as for birds and other species. Seeing similar environmental activities of churches I would argue that local churches are playing a major role in propagating Christian understanding of ecology and the re-ordering of God’s creations in a praxis centred manner. All diocesan eco-centered programs and activities are based on the understanding and belief that Christians must be aware of their duty to take care of God’s creations.

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[73] Moses P. David, interviewed on 23/07/2015
[74] Koshy George, interviewed on 22/07/2015
[75] Cherian, interviewed on 23/07/2015

In order to propagate Christian environmental concerns all diocese have begun to hold seminars for their congregations and include some practical steps such as introduction of ecological syllabus for Sunday school children, ecological Bible studies for youth groups and awareness programs regarding the use of solar energy, organic farming, rain water harvesting, etc. Jyoti Isaac, the youth coordinator, who introduced ecological awareness programmes for the first time among the youth in Kerala region during 1990s explained his experience with much pleasure and satisfaction. He said that although in the past it has been a challenge for him to introduce a Christian approach to ecology, members of the youth group slowly began to accept ecological ideologies, and now it is well accepted by them. His words reveal the intensity of its acceptance. He said,

> While I was working as the Youth Worker in my Diocese I conducted seminars at the District level based on the theme, "Good News to All Creations' for three years. At the end of the third year I organized an essay writing competition on the same theme which I had taught across the Diocese. There were 300 entries which was very rare during 1990s.[76]

He voiced a range of environment – related problems in his praxis centred efforts, and approached environmental philosophy in a more practical way. He received enormous support and participation from the diocese because he could inculcate environmental concerns through pragmatic dimensions. I believe that over time, people will become more praxis centred as a result of being taught about nature and its relationship in line with faith tradition.

4.4.2. Institutional Environmental Activism

Christian environmental pragmatism has been propagated by Christian institutions along with their theological curriculum. Christian ministers who have completed their theological studies at the Kerala United Theological Seminary were given enormous opportunities to get first-hand experience in the ways of caring for the environment. The ministers who had been given the chance to study "Creation Ecology" have subsequently initiated creative steps to introduce ecological awareness to members of the church and secular communities. Richard M. Clugston argues that a seminary which holds greening visions in its vision and mission can interact influentially with churches to encourage ecclesial and community action for

[76] Jyoti Isacc, interviewed on 09/08/2015

sustainability and justice.[77] He suggests a wide scope of Christian environmental perspectives which could carry out environmental actions in their own denominational and ecumenical contexts by bearing a coherent faith-based ethical perspective. T. I. James, an ordained minister of the Malabar Diocese, who was a student of the Kerala United Theological Seminary recalled his ecological learning during his theological study period. He explained the way he was ecologically challenged and equipped by the theological institution as he narrated one of his experiences to me. He said,

> When I was in Shornur 15 years ago we planted saplings but now they all became big trees. It was such a joy that when we travel down that road, we can see on the road side, the youth, myself and other religious leaders of the society they all joined together to plant such small beginnings, it became trees, and even we can see some small petty shops. They are using the shade of the tree for their livelihood also.[78]

The vision learned from the theological institution inspired T. I. James to take up ecological initiations for the environmental betterment of the church and society.

From my observation I understand that young students are remarkably open in listening to ecological wisdom and ready to respond to environmental concerns with a strong participative approach. All educational institutions in the CSI dioceses in Kerala are keen to incorporate environmental values in the educational life of the colleges and schools. Institutions have formed environmental teams with different names, but all engage within the institutions and the society at large. My visit to Malabar Christian College provided me with valuable information regarding the praxis centred role educational institutions play in the propagation of environmental concern.

'Eco-friends', a student organization of the Malabar Christian College actively promotes its ideology that each member is entrusted by God the Creator to perform their responsibility as stewards of His creation. The Principal of Malabar Christian College Prof. Mary Gladys Pavamani said that although Eco-friends is a Christian student club it ecologically influences students from other faith backgrounds in all its engagements.[79] In her words,

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[77] Richard M. Clugston, 'The Praxis of Institutional Greening' in Dieter T. Hessel (ed) *Theology for Earth Community* (Maryknoll, New York: Oebis Books, 1996), 224.
[78] T. I. James, interviewed on 10/07/2015.
[79] Mary Gladys Pavamani, interviewed on 10/07/2015

> we have Eco Friends, started in 2012, where the students make paper bags and work in the garden. They are involved in the protection and awareness of the environment. Last year they planted a medicinal garden, they are very interested in that, and the students are very close to the nature.[80]

The "Eco Friends" group pursues its environmental vision by connecting Christian understanding about creation with the needs of the local communities. Students are trained to address the needs of society in the light of their ecological vision. Kishore, a junior lecturer said that the members of the Eco Friends are,

> Against plastic, so they collect and carry it a designated area for its disposal. I believe that these actions send a clear message to the Corporation which hopefully will be taken on by their staff. They also give ecological awareness classes to other students, and they make paper bags, and they give classes to uneducated women to make paper bags, this is not only in the college, in their neighbouring villages and in their neighbouring schools also.[81]

Inspired by Christian moral teachings Eco Friends engage in society by carrying out the environmental mission of the church. This eco club acts as an agent among secular people. Its aim is for a better tomorrow which they call a sustainable future. Educational institutions can provide more opportunities for students to study campus and local environmental problems and impacts.[82] This dimension is certainly visible in the academic life of the educational institution of the CSI diocese in Kerala. Eco clubs have therefore become a platform for educational institutions to promote and affirm environmental values. This platform has immensely helped educational institutions to propagate green values. The Malabar Christian College has come up with the vision of a Green Campus with the objective of cultivating ecological consciousness among Christian students and students from other faith backgrounds.[83] This initiative enables institutions to create an environmentally concerned generation by helping to integrate education and eco-friendly life styles.

I understand that all higher education centres in every diocese in Kerala have formed eco clubs to inculcate environmental knowledge to the students in various capacities. Both major and minor educational institutions and all schools have eco clubs in order to equip students to think and act environmentally. Pro-environmental concerns have been brought into the public sphere by connecting religious concerns

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[80] Mary Gladys Pavamani, interviewed on 10/07/2015
[81] Kishore, Interviewed on 10/07.2015
[82] Richard M. Clugston, 'The Praxis of Institutional Greening', in Dieter T. Hessel (ed) *Theology for Earth Community* (Maryknoll, New York: Oebis Books, 1996), 222.
[83] Sheeba P.S, Green Campus Revelution, Malabar Sabhamithram, 1, 1, (2017), 11.

into action centred dimension. Educational institutions have become centres for environmental activism in CSI dioceses in Kerala.

Sandra T. Marquart-Pyatt defines environmental activism as an organised participation in environmental issues, which "tends to be expressed in specific activities reflecting a commitment to the environment channelled in formal setting and realised through institutional structures."[84] She argues that there are many factors which influence environmental activism such as individual resources, knowledge, awareness of consequences, attitudes, willingness to contribute, and efficacy. Don E. Marietta Jr includes thinking, speaking and writing about care for nature in environmental activism.[85] In his perspective campus activism in institutions and activism in the community can also be used to create environmental behaviours. Christian environmental activism is directly connected with these influencing factors based on the faith centered environmental attitudes and behaviours.

4.4.3. Widening Environmental Activism and Its Influence to People of Other Religious Traditions

Environmental initiations have a vital role to play in bringing people together, irrespective of any religious tradition, to render their service for common causes. Religious communities can set aside their divergences to converge towards finding solutions for environmental problems in a local setting. Christian commitment to practical environmental concerns influences people of other faiths in making them environmental activists and its beneficiaries. Religious environmental activism among the other religious communities can help spark the passion and concrete action that is required in order to successfully drive social action forward. T. I. James explained how environmental activism contributes in influencing people to become more eco-friendly. He said, "We are living in a pluralistic society. If we present programmes which are related to the environment there are no religious disparities. All Hindus, Muslims, and other religions, irrespective of caste and political banners, will join in this kind of activity, especially over issues such as water. He gave an example of this from his own village of Vaniyankulam where water scarcity is a major issue. He said that,

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[84] Sandra T. Marquart-Pyatt, 'Explaining Environmental Activism Across Countries', *Society & Natural Resources*, 25:7 (2011) 684.
[85] Don E. Marietta Jr, 'Introduction', in Don E. Marietta and Lester Embree (eds) *Environmental Philosophy & Environmental Activism* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc, 1995), 1-15.

> We introduced a programme where young people worked with the village authorities to identify water resources. Now, with the initiative of the church and with the help of the neighbourhood irrespective of religion, they have their own programme for water harvesting.[86]

This proves that people of whatever faith, religious belief or none, can and should work together to protect our planet earth. His environmental praxis centred concern opens up a space to extend environmental ideologies designed to remind faith communities about their responsibility towards the sacred act of stewarding all creation.

After analysing Christian environmental mission programmes I would argue that Christian environmental activism brings people together from different faith traditions that have a common love for the environment. T. I. James continued to say that from his theological social experiences,

> my faith compels me to take the initiative to gather people, to network people and to take steps towards this good cause. Then others will also have the same concerns and join us in this concern. That is amazing. This can become a model for the other churches and other parts of the diocese.[87]

Through such initiatives, the church makes environmental loving relationships with other communities and organizations in order to work for a better future. It opens up a public space in community life for dialogue designed to cultivate a profound passion for the earth and the environment in local communities and faith groups. The public space in community life can also embrace environmental justice concerns to address all kinds of environmental problems experienced locally.

Abraham observes that all religions have their own traditions of worship. He does not see worship as the only possible common action that different religions could utilise. In a country like India where multi-religious traditions exist, united actions for the welfare of humankind and environment can be promoted extensively. He argues that religions

> can also unite in measures that prevent ecological degradation through deforestation, pollution of lakes and rivers and the like. Every congregation may be challenged to undertake a specific programme on environmental protection in co-operation with people of other faiths in its area.[88]

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[86] T. I. James, interviewed on 10/07/2015
[87] T. I. James, interviewed on 10/07/2016
[88] [88] K. C. Abraham, 'A Theological Response to the Ecological Crisis', in David G. Hallman (ed), *Eco Theology: Voices from South and North* (Geneva: WCC, 1994), 78.

The environmental concerns of the church influence the social behaviour of communities. Environmental education with an activist centred approach has considerable impacts in peoples' commitment to care for nature. The praxis centred environmental ministry of the church aims at formulating a wide range of environmental behaviour which leads the congregations towards environmentally sustainable way of living. It is found that the Protestant Christians in Kerala have developed a praxis centred theology that creating an example of environmentally sound living is activism.

4.5. Conclusion

The life and mission of the Protestant churches in Kerala is deeply rooted in the worship which channels ecological insights as the salvific responsibility towards the restoration of God's creations. The members of the church believe that nature is sacred because God created nature and nature is understood as the expression of the transcendent. This understanding directs them to live in harmony with nature. Understanding this harmony with nature, the place of worship invites people to praise God for the marvellous creation, and the holy sanctuary reminds the worshipers that creation itself praises God, and to see the revelation of God in the natural world. Ecclesial rituals such as pilgrimage, sanctuary and Eucharist play a significant role in sustaining regular practices among Christians.[89] Churches locally and jointly along with educational institutions and other departments are increasingly educating their own people about the linkages between their faith and acting to address environmental concerns, and mobilising locally to take personal action to care for the environment. Religiously grounded ecological values reflected in the understanding of the members of the local churches are the sources for formulating the concepts of scared environment and environmental activism. The Christian environmental activism of the CSI Christian communities is that environmental behaviour moves beyond personal level to ecclesial and then moves to wider locations, and is seen as a social commitment to care for the distressed earth and its victims.

Christianity in Kerala is not a foreign import despite claims of Hindu nationalists. What I have shown is the considerable extent to which Keralan

[89] Michael S. Northcott, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming* (London: Christian Aid & DLT, 2007).

Christians actually reflect indigenous Indian traditions in which nature is considered to be sacred and manifest their commitment to care for nature and environmental behaviour and concerns in their worship, rituals and practices. In order to show the parallels that I claim exist between Christianity and indigenous Indian religion it will be helpful to situate the Christian case studies alongside one case study of indigenous people in the same region, hence I am now moving in chapter five to a case study of the Kani people who dwell in the region considered to be the South Kerala Diocese. The Kani chapter is about the pre-Christian tradition – which continues to influence Christianity but has evolved a bit. This is why I need to highlight it.

Chapter 5

Nature Conservation and Resource Management 'From Below': An Ecological Image of the Kani Tribe

5.1. Introduction

Indigenous people are generally regarded as traditional communities who pay substantial importance to practice sustainable relationships with the natural world and recent environmental studies have concentrated on exploring how traditional ecological knowledge helps in managing resources in local environments. Their understanding about the relationship between the sacred and sustainability is manifested in the prudent use of resource management and nature conservation approaches. The ecological behaviour manifested in the rituals and practices of the CSI Keralan Christians have a long historical connection with the indigenous traditions, and the similarities are seen in religious tradition, agricultural practices, traditional knowledge and environmental practices. However, the sacred dimension of ecology has not been properly investigated to understand the Keralan Christian communities' ecological connection with indigenous ecological traditions. In this chapter I argue that the ecological behaviour associated with the indigenous rituals and practices is well expressed in the rituals and practices of the CSI Christians in Kerala. My ethnographic study at the Puravimala Kani tribal colony, 40 miles from Thiruvananthapuram (capital city of Kerala Sate), provides substantial evidence to support my claim regarding the historical roots of the ecological traditions of the Keralan Christianity. There are several beliefs and practices associated with their tribal life culture by which they are able to preserve the eco-system. Their rituals and myths, traditional wisdom and environmental practices, and nature conservation are useful ways in which they generate environmentalism "from below." However, it is understood that indigenous and traditional cultures are disappearing from their cultural and geographical locations due to invasions 'from above.'

5.2. **Ethnographic Location of the Ecological Landscape of Kani Tribal Community**

The Kani are a tribe living in the Western Ghats area of the Southern part of Kerala, India. The term 'tribal' is commonly used in India to refer to the indigenous communities. In Kerala the Kani tribe is generally categorised as Adivasi. Adivasi is the collective name used for the many indigenous peoples of India. The term Adivasi derives from the Hindi word 'adi' which means from the beginning and 'vasi' meaning inhabitant or resident. They are the original inhabitants who maintained an ecological relationship with the forest lands by considering them as sacred. Frederique Apffel-Marglin and Pramod Parulji suggest that "Adivasis in India have named their religion the religion of the Sacred Groves (sarna)."[1] In my analysis I use the term indigenous[2] for the Kani tribe based on the claim of Andrew Grey that,

> Indigenous is not a static concept but a growing phenomenon which is increasingly being adopted throughout the world by vulnerable peoples who claim their rights on the basis of occupation prior to the existence of the state… Indigenous identity, however, includes a political dimension where each person relates to a collectively as a member of a people, tribe or nation.[3]

Kani identity carries a community dimension, which emerges from their religious and environmental rituals and practices. Therefore, I believe that ascribing the term indigenous to them will help to lead my analysis productively.

The Kani/Kanikar tribe is traditionally a nomadic community but today all of them have been settled for a long time. They are considered to be the earliest inhabitants in the region of Kerala.[4] They are a forest dwelling tribe in Kerala, scattered over 28 settlements in Western Ghats of Thiruvananthapuram District.

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[1] Frederique Apffel-Marglin and Pramod Parulji, "Sacred Grove" and Ecology: Ritual and Science in Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Hinduism and Ecology* (Massachachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000).291

[2] Don McCaskill and Jeff Rutherford, 'Indigenous peoples of South-East Asia: poverty, identity and resistance' in Robyn Eversole, john-Andrew Mcneish and Alberto d. Cimadamore (eds) *Indigenous peoples and poverty an international perspective* (London and New York: Zed Books,2005), 154. In their words, "The term indigenous peoples as used in the South-East Asian context differs from the more common usage of the term in, for example, North America, Australia or New Zealand. In these nations indigenous peoples have been referred to as tribal peoples, Indians, native peoples, aboriginal peoples and, more recently, as First Nations. In this context the term refers to the original inhabitants who have lived in a territory from time immemorial, have been subjugated by colonial regimes, and by virtue of their occupation of a territory possess certain usufructory rights (rights of occupancy and usage) to the land."

[3] Andrew Grey, 'Who are Indigenous Peoples?' in Silvia Buchi, Christian Erni, Luzia Jurt and Christoph Ruegg, (eds), *Indigenous Peoples, Environment and Development* (Denmark: International Work for Indigenous Affires, 1997), 16.

[4] A. Sreedharamenon, *Kerala History and its Makers* (Kottayam: DC Books, 2010), 19.

They call themselves Kanikaran which means “hereditary proprietor of land.”[5] They live together in small communities in the forest which are a haven for wildlife, and covered by moist deciduous trees, grass lands, rivulets and streams. It is also known for its rich wealth of medicinal plants, some of which are rare in occurrence.[6] The Kanikar (Kanikar meaning a hereditary proprietor of the land,[7]) live together in small communities, under a head man who is called Muttukani. A Muttukani learns knowledge regarding spiritual, medical and administration from his ancestors. Writing in 1883, Samuel Mateer reports that everyone had a decent life because they cultivated their own piece of land, which provided for their daily need and enabled them to share their agricultural produce with their community members. Today, the Kanikars dwell in family groups on the mountain slopes, in the valleys and on different terrains of the forests. Each house has a small garden at the front where rubber trees, Mango trees, Jack trees and Palm trees are maintained and fruit trees and flowering plants are grown. In addition to this, and although facing destruction from wild animals, they cultivate tapioca, banana, millets and cash crops such as pepper, coconut, arecanut and cashewnut etc., all on the limited land which was given to them by the Forest Department.

I have produced a comparison based on the data from the field, and libraries and archives to explore how the indigenised communities were in the past and how they are today in their approach to nature. Samuel Mateer (1835-1893), was an active missionary of the London Missionary Society (Travancore) and a nature lover, who attached great importance to the documentation of stories regarding the religious, cultural, agricultural and environmental practices of the Kani tribes in Thiruvananthapuram District. His narrations are therefore a rich source of information which contributes to the understanding of the changes that have taken place in the life and practice of Kani tribes. In an ethno-ecological analysis finding practices such as eco-centred rituals and ceremonies play a significant role, as such an analysis of local resources and management practices may reveal information

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[5] Samuel Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore* (London: W. H. Allen & Co., Walterloo Place, 1883), 63.

[6] Mónica Ruoti, Rolando Oddone, Nathalie Lampert, Elizabeth Orué, Michael A. Miles, Neal Alexander, Andrea M. Rehman, Rebecca Njord, Stephanie Shu, Susannah Brice, Bryony Sinclair, and Alison Krentel, *Mucocutaneous leishmaniasis: knowledge, attitudes, and practices among paraguayan communities, patients, and health professionals.* https://www.hindawi.com/journals/jtm/2013/538629/, viewed on 13/12/2016

[7] http://nopr.niscair.res.in/bitstream/123456789/1006/1/IJTK%206(4)%20(2007)%20589-594.pdf, viewed on 21/10/2016

that most of the time is overlooked by quantitative studies.[8] Since my research is aimed at knowing the Kani tribes approach to sacred and sustainability I believe that interconnecting elements of their environmental knowledge has to be analysed on the basis of their history.

In the field, my ethnographic research attempted to create competent social interaction with the members of the field, and to obtain needed information from the informants. The data obtained from the Kani settlement is the product of interactions with local people in the form of observations, interviews, informal conversations held during lunch or tea times, visiting places of worship, listening to stories, and chatting during boating trips. In my analysis, I follow Galaty's advice in distinguishing between "data which is anthropologically processed information (notes, census material, photographs etc.), the sources of data which are various modes of observation (visual and auditory channels, recording of discourse, formal and informal interviews, narrative records etc.), and the theoretically constructed objects of analysis and observation (which may be conceptualized as individual events, human motivations, cultural models, folk models, biological types etc.)."[9] In the process of reviewing the data gathered from Puravimala and Parathy, I made time to apply a comparison between what people thought, did and believed in regarding the environment in the present age compared to in the past. I believe that this mode of comparative analysis is necessary in order to lead my investigation to address my research questions.

The data I collected from Puravimala was found to have meaningful comparisons with their life in the past. It is mainly understood from the analysis that the Kani tribe in Puravimala is living in harmony with nature by considering nature to be sacred and sharing their local resources towards a sustainable living. Their belief, community living, and knowledge system are linked with animate and inanimate beings. They share their knowledge system among their members through mythical narratives, rituals, life skills, and modes of environmental awareness. Their knowledge regarding the land is linked with knowing their physical body (embedded knowledge), which is again connected with their social body and ecological body. It is also evident that the Kani tribe is experiencing the consequences of the changes

[8] Emilio F. Moran and Edurado S. Brondizio, 'Human Ecology from Space: Ecological anthropology Engages the Study of Global environment' in Ellen Messer and Michael Lamberk (eds) *Ecology and the Sacred Engaging the Anthropology of Roy A. Rpappaport* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2001).69.
[9] J. G. Galaty, 'Models and Metaphors: On the Semiotic Explanation of Segamentary Systems' in Ladislav Holy and Milan Stuchlik (eds) *In the Structure of Folk Models* (New York: Academic Press, 1981), 90.

of modernity in their religious, social, cultural and political realms. It is understood that this tribal community keeps ecological consciousness in their present practices and thinking although their traditional ecological practices have been controlled by the government. I have analysed their traditional practices such as shifting cultivation and hunter gathering in order to examine to what extent their ecological and ethical consciousness are relevant to strengthen Indian Christian environmental theology.

5.3. Shifting Cultivation and Hunter Gathering: A Manifestation of Traditional Ecological Practices and Ethics

Cultivation and collection of forest resources are ecologically expressed in the daily sustenance of Kani tribes. This finding has been highlighted from my historical reading of the Kani tribes and field interviews and observation. Cultivation was being performed as collective practice in a manner that respected nature and its care. Cultivation was linked with a religious dimension and was accepted by the community as a sacred act of ecological and social conservation.

5.3.1. Cultivation as Ecological Conservation

The cultivation and preservation of their dwelling places are deeply connected with their religious affairs. They practiced shifting cultivation in the past and now this mode of cultivation has been stopped for many reasons. They cultivated their forest land with a religious closeness to nature. Their nomadic nature, in terms of cultivation, required that they pass their remembered knowledge regarding nature conservation to the next generation. Since they considered all trees and mountains to be sacred, when they moved to new land it became their spiritual land. The clearing of land and mulch burning for cultivation were considered to be a symbol of their responsibility to care for the land. In the past this practice was understood as a means of natural conservation of biodiversity of the land. Mateer's account of Kani life gives a clear picture of their method of cultivation in the past. Mateer writes,

> These wandering husbandmen cut down a patch of forest, burn and clear it, and sow a crop, with little or no tillage. After cultivating this plot for two or three years, it is exhausted, and they move off in search of fertile land for a fresh field for operations, though not to great distance. They grow rice and millet, tapioca and sweet potatoes, as is done in the low country. This mode of cultivation yields a larger return for the same amount of labour than permanent plough husbandry, but is highly destructive of valuable forest lands. Their migrant habit arises partly from laziness: it is easier to cut down

> and burn new forest than to rear cattle, plant trees, manure land, and build houses.[10]

The Kanis begin cultivation under the guidance of Muttukani, the headman of their Illam. For Kanis, cultivation has two dimensions; feeding their people and feeding their environment. Mateer writes,

> When intending to clear some land, the headman is invited; three edungaly[11] measures of rice and six coconuts are presented to him. These he takes to a suitable plot of forest-land, makes an offering, and first clears a small portion with his own hand... These offerings are repeated at the burning of the felled timber, and the sowing of the seed, plantain fruits and other articles being added. On the first appearance of the year, they spend two nights in drumming, singing, and repeating mantras at the field, putting up a tattu, or platform, on four sticks as a shrine for the spirits, where they offer raw rice, tender coconuts, flowers, etc.[12]

All members of their *Illam* are present at the start of cultivation. Their mantras unite them with spiritual power and reminds their ancestral practice of conserving the nature and feeding the members of the *Illam*. The Kani harvest had many rituals directly linked with their belief in their ancestral spirits. Mateer writes,

> At harvest-time, a sufficient quantity of rice being taken, sweetmeats are prepared, plantain fruits, and flowers added to a general offering to the various spirits, such as Ayiravilli, “he of a thousand bows;” Madan Thamburan, “the cow-like Lord;” Mallan Thamburan, “the giant Lord;” Mathandan Pey, “the Sun Demon;” Puch Mallan Pay, “the Cat Giant Demon;” Athirakodi Pey, “the Boundary Flag Demon,” and a great many others whom they regard as deities. They wait upon the headman for the manifestation of the gods, then devour the offerings.[13]

Mateer’s account clearly indicates that they were joyous as they harvested various agricultural crops from their fields. Even though they practiced shifting cultivation, they were cultivating different crops, which is similar to integral cropping system. According to them such methods of farming sustain their relationship with the environment, and ensures community justice, mutual trust and sustainable living.

Through shifting the type of cultivation they sought their daily sustenance and not for commercial gain. They believed that this pattern of cultivation could help them to use natural fertilization and to keep the balance of the natural biodiversity. Today, no one is doing this. Now they have their own land, which has been given to them by

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[10] Samuel Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore*, 64.
[11] Edungaly was an old scale used in Kerala to measure grains, and edungaly is one and half Kg)
[12] Samuel Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore*, 68-69.
[13] Samuel Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore*, 69.

the government and they are not allowed to go into the forest for the purpose of cultivation. Once their land, as rich in biodiversity as in the natural forest, is now supporting cash crops like rubber trees. Showing me to some coconut trees a Kani tribesman, Parappan akani said,

> In the past we were not cultivating in a permanent place. We cultivated for three years in one place and then moved to other another place in the fourth year. We cleared the grass, and burnt it to use it as fertilizer. We previously cultivated pepper, tapioca, yam and my grandfathers didn't plant coconut trees. I planted all these coconut trees.[14]

Caring for the land in which they will begin to cultivate has religious significance. While I was interviewing Parappan Kani, he said they were not planting coconut trees in their settlements. However, in Mateer's accounts, it states that when the land was to be cleared six coconuts were presented to the headman. This indicates that Mateer's account may not be correct and that he might have been narrating an event connected with local Hindu ways of puja. From my observation and interviews I learned that Kanis do not use any objects from outside their settlement while they are conducting puja. Harvesting is also an important event in their lives.

Kanis follow their agricultural system with a religious approach, which is strongly linked to certain rituals. Now they commonly offer rituals to *Kalattuthamburan*, who they believe protects their crops and gives them good harvests which sustain their lives. Their agricultural practices are a testament to their commitment to sustainable farming as they have learnt how to balance their requirements with the environment. Even now they do not overconsume the resources of their forest as they are aware of the importance of conserving them for future generations.

Their approach to farming is respectful of their local environment and as such ensures economic justice, prudence and natural biodiversity, which shows a perspective to the modernised agriculturists regarding conserving soil, care for local communities and biotic communities. Northcott's views regarding farming are therefore appropriate and worthy of note. According to him,

> Farming which conserves the soil, which respects the landscapes and seek the good of all its inhabitants and not just the monocrop, is farming which involves justice, prudence, fidelity and patience. Such virtues are not valued

[14] Parappan Kani, interviewed on 18/07/2015

> by the narrow cost-benefit calculus of the productionist farming metaphor that drives chemical agriculture.[15]

Moreover, the relational experience of tribal communities with nature and persons of their community are essential features of human experience.[16] Indigenous management of forest land helps to maintain environment for thousands of years without significant loss of biodiversity.[17] The Kanis' practice of cultivation maintains their food production and aims at an increase in ecosystem richness.

The practice of shifting cultivation was stopped mainly by forest laws, which forbids the Kani from moving from their allotted land to other land. In the past they practised shifting cultivation till the Maharaja's rule was ended. The land rights act affected the Kani tribes in particular and the other tribal communities in general in practising their traditional cultivation in their forest land. The year 1911 is a memorable one in the history of the Scheduled Tribes in Kerala. The Maharaja of Travancore introduced tribal welfare legislation under the Hillmen Rule, 1011 which aimed at the supervision and control of the land assigned to the tribals for cultivation and to prevent the exploitation by non-tribal money lenders, contractors and traders.[18] But the Land Acquisition Act 1894, and the Indian Forest Act 1927 made their life miserable as it questioned their forest culture and cultivation practices. In general however, the Land Acquisition Act 1894 and the Indian Forest Act helped considerably to protect the forest land from the acquisition of forest land and forest resources from non-tribal communities. Nalunnakkal observes that,

> the increase of the reserve forests entails a decrease in the unclassified forests where the tribals have many rights. When the protected forests are turned into the reserved category, the tribals have much less access to the forest produce. Thus it eventually leads to the depletion of food resources and to the starvation of tribals, besides the climatic and ecological imbalances deforestation causes.[19]

Now when each Kani is given a piece of land it comes with the stipulation that it be used only for cultivation in accordance with the guidance from Agricultural Extension

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[15] Michael S. Northcott, Soil, Stewardship and Spirit in the Era of Chemical Agriculture in R. J. Berry (ed) *Environmental Stewardship: Critica/; Perspective – Past and Present* (London: T & T Clark International,2006).218.
[16] Northcott, *The environment and Christian Ethics*, 1996, 116.
[17] Michael S. Northcott, *Place, Ecology and the Sacred: A Moral Geography of Sustainable Communities* (London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2015), 67.
[18] Hillmen Rules 1911, Rule 2 Regulations and Proclamations of Travancore, Vol. 1010-1070, 758
[19] George Mathew Nalunnakkal, *Green Liberation: Towards an Integral Ecotheology* (Delhi: ISPCK/NCCI, 1999), 35.

Programmes. Therefore those tribal lands are being converted to monocrops, mainly rubber plantations. These plantations are a major threat to the ecosystem of their environment. It is understood that this transition from a multi-cropping centred shifting cultivation to a mono-cropping system has created a decrease in food availability, biodiversity and the extinction of medicinal and aromatic plants.

5.3.2. Hunter Gathering as Nurturing Eco-system

The Kanis were hunter gatherers, but they are not allowed to hunt or gather legally. In the past, when required, they hunted forest animals to supplement their diet, but now they have only have permission to collect bamboo from the forest for the purpose of daily sustenance. Collection of non-timber forest products such as honey, bee's wax, medicinal plants, gums and wild edible root tubers are also permitted by the forest officers. Mateer writes about the Kanis' gathering practice, "They gather wild honey in the clefts of rocks and on the branches of trees, and bring it home or for sale, in joints of bamboo."[20] Earlier they were also selling those gathered forest resources such as honey, gum, medicinal turmeric, tapioca, tuber, yam and areca nut for buying rice and other essential commodities for their livelihood from the market.

The relationship between the hunter-gatherer and their environment is based on mutual trust. "The essence of trust is a peculiar combination of autonomy and dependency. To trust someone is to act with that person in mind, in the hope and expectation that she will do likewise – responding in ways favourable to you – so long as you do nothing to curb her autonomy to act otherwise."[21] Schmink et al describe the general mode of subsistence of the indigenous communities as a number of certain interventions. In that way, although the mode of subsistence of hunter-gatherers is indistinguishable with others, their style of securing a living from the resources of nature can be described as management,[22] a management based on need.

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[20] Samuel Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore* (London: W. H. Allen & Co., Walterloo Place, 1883), 66.
[21] Tim Ingold, 'From trust to domination: an alternative history of human-animal relations' In Tim Ingold (ed) *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 69-70.
[22] M Schmink, K. H. Redford, C Padoch, 'Traditional Peoples and the Biosphere: Framing the Issues and Defining the Terms' in K. H. Redford and C Padoch (eds) *Conservation of Neotropical Forests: Working from Traditional Resources Use* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

Bird-David progresses this view by strikingly projecting the hunter-gatherers' mode of subsistence as an expression of world integrity.[23] Her field work in South India and Malaysia describes the hunter-gatherers approach to their environment as a 'giving environment'.[24] For gatherers a giving environment is for sharing purposes in their local environment. Her close observations show their integral approach to the environment.[25] The view of oneness, in that nature is seen as a giver and things to be shared, is central to their relationship within their community living. Similar to this depiction, Milton opines that, "Hunter-gatherers distinguish themselves from their environment and see their relationship with it as harmonious, based on respect and consideration."[26] This behavioural approach to the environment was highly visible in their practice of hunting and gathering. According to Northcott, "Hunter-gatherers also have a close knowledge of the inter-relationships of different animals and plants. Hunter-gatherers are, though, responsible for some ecological destruction."[27] He characterises the moral feature of the hunters and gatherers. In his words,

> The hunter will not carry off all the young from a bird's nest because the birds are his neighbours and have need of life as well as his own family. The gatherer harvests only enough nuts or fruits from a bush to feed her family and neighbours, leaving some for others, or to fall to the ground as seed.[28]

Killing is not part of Kanis' religious and environmental discourse. For them human and other living and non-living objects are living together and enjoy the same value. Therefore they acknowledge the life of all beings in their pujas. Babu Kani said their puja for rain also depicts the value of the life all beings. He said, "When the drought season comes we perform a ritual to bring rain. We make an image of a child made from mud and sacrifice it near the banks of a stream. In the last drought season people from ten Illams gathered near a stream called Pillayitta Kayam where we made a tent and conducted a puja. During the puja we made an image of a child in soil and people offered wild flowers while chanting mantras and dancing. Thirty minutes after the completion of the puja to our god, Kalattuthamburan, it started to

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[23] Nurit Bird-David, 'Beyond "The Original Affluent Society": A Culturalist Reformulation', Current Anthropology 33, 1 (1992), 25-47.
[24] Nurit Bird-David, 'The Giving Environment: Another Perspective on the Economic System of Gatherer-Hunter', *Current Anthropology* 31, 2, (1990), 189-96.
[25] Nurit Bird-David, 'Beyond "The Original Affluent Society": A Culturalist Reformulation', 25-47.
[26] Kay Milton, 'Nature and the Environment in Indigenous and Traditional Cultures' in David E. Cooper and Joy A. Palmer (eds) *Spirit of the Environment: Religion, Value and Environmental Concern* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 92.
[27] Northcott, *The environment and Christian Ethics* 1996, 42.
[28] Northcott, *The environment and Christian Ethics* 1996, 43.

pour with rain." [29] Their hunter-gathering practice maintains the idea of the value of life in all their actions and activities. Through this practice Kanis understand the environmental condition of the forest land and they are committed to give necessary attention to regenerate the richness of the biodiversity.

Destruction of life is not part of the life of the Kanis. They send away the wild animals which come to destroy their crops in the agricultural field. Northcott claims there is "something to learn from hunter-gatherers about styles of agriculture and artefact production which are more closely attuned to the natural regenerative processes of the land, which generate very little waste, and which leave more of nature's inheritance behind for future generations."[30] For Kani the living environment is a giving environment, which often enhances, rather than reduces, biodiversity.

5.4. Nature as Sacred, Provider of Resources and Treasurer of Wisdom

5.4.1. Nature as Sacred

The conservation of forest groves and maintenance of a harmonious relationship with animals in the forest environment are part of indigenous culture, which embedded and perpetuated by customs and religious beliefs. The Kanis sacred groves, home to a wide diversity of species, teaches them to view their environment with sacred eyes. Their respect for all life encompasses the smallest creature and plant, as they consider that everything in nature has spiritual power. Therefore they strongly believe that everything in nature can help them in times of hardship or struggle. Jisha, an educated female member of the Kani tribe said that,

> We believe in god who lives in the nature. We have religious rituals and ceremonies. We respect all resources of the nature. We believe that the spirit of Kalattuthamburan dwells in all objects. Therefore we use stone as a symbol of Kalattuthamburan's presence during the time of pujas. We put a stone under a tree and light a lamp before that.[31]

Kanis strongly believe that nature is sacred. Babu, a government employee from this Kani settlement narrated a story which reveals how their relationship with nature is religiously rooted in the life. He said,

> I can tell you a story in connection with birds. It is about a bird, which is known among us as 'neduviliyan.' One day two brothers went to the forest in search of food. They walked a lot, and they felt tired and hungry. Immediately they

[29] Babu Kani, interviewed on 17/10/2016
[30] Michael S. Northcott, *The environment and Christian Ethics* 1996, 44.
[31] Jisha, interviewed on 18/07/2015

> saw a tree called 'Anjili (Artocarpus Hirsutus) full of ripened fruits. Since it was a big tree, they made a ladder, and the elder brother climbed up the tree. He plucked as many fruits as possible and threw them down to his younger brother. After collecting all of them and he took the ladder and left his brother at the top the tree. When the elder brother realised that he had been left on the tree by his brother he started to shout for help. But nobody heard his cry and so he prayed to his mountain god, and the mountain god sent all the birds in the forest to the tree and all the birds shed their feathers. Thus the elder brother took the feathers of different colours and with their help flew back to his home by becoming a bird. We see a big bird with different colours of feathers in our forest, we call it 'neduviliyan.' It comes even now to our forest and cry in loud voice in evening times and in the early morning hours.[32]

Babu said all objects in nature help each other as they are guided by the spirit of *Kalattuthamburan*. Therefore they give an important place to *Kavu* in their religious ceremonies. *Kavu* is a place of worship, and it is where their rituals are performed. In Puravimala Kani settlement, the place of worship is located at the source of a small stream which eventually joins the Neyyar River. It is at this starting point, located under a tall tree, that the image of their traditional god can be found. For them this *Kavu* is located in and surrounded by a beautiful sacred grove.

They believe that *Kalattuthamburan's* presence is in the grove, and *Kalattuthamburan* dwells in the mountains, trees and in all animate and inanimate objects. Therefore they have no images in their place of worship. Mateer writes, "No images or sacred stones are used, but a small stone may be taken when required as an idol or fetish."[33] Through all worship and pujas, offerings and sacrifice they learn to care for the nature."[34]

Their belief is deeply connected to nature. They still believe that nature affects their lives in all good things and bad things. Nature can direct their community life with supernatural power. Babu Kani told of a practice which is prevalent in their *Illams*. He said,

> We have a tree called "charu." It is our experience that if we have committed any evil deed, we will be poisoned when we touch this tree and red blisters will appear on our body. Then we will go to the Banyan tree in order to heal our wounds. We go round the tree seven times. While we walk around the tree we seek the pardon of the tree and it only then that our wounds would begin to disappear from our bodies.[35]

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[32] Babu Kani, interviewed on 17/10/2016
[33] Samuel Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore*, 69.
[34] Samuel Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore*, 70.
[35] Babu Kani, interviewed on 17/10/2016

Kani religiosity is grounded in their faith in spiritual beings. They strongly believe that spiritual beings can intervene in their life at any moment. Spiritual beings are known among them in accordance with the qualities ascribed to them associated with their spiritual power to nature. This perspective can be understood through Durkheim's view that,

> Spiritual beings must be understood to mean conscious subjects that have capacities superior to those of ordinary men, which therefore rightly includes the souls of the dead, genies, and demons as well as deities, properly so-called. It is important to notice immediately the particular idea of religion that this definition entails. The only relations we can have with beings of this sort are determined by the nature ascribed to them.[36]

Prayers, sacrifices and rituals reinforce Kani religiosity, and are completely tied with the objective of reverence to and the care for nature.

Kani religiosity is animistic in nature, which addresses spiritual beings – spirits, souls, genies and demons. Such beings, according to Durkheim, "are animate and conscious agents, like man, but differ from man in the nature of the powers ascribed to them, in particular the special characteristic that they do not affect the senses in the same way; they are not usually perceptible to human eyes. This religion of spirits is called animism."[37] Kani ceremonial and ritual practices are deeply rooted in the spirit of Kalattuthamburan, which offers a sense of community living in harmony with their environment. Their oneness with nature sustains their daily life through different ceremonial engagements. At the time of cultivation and harvest all their efforts to sustain their life are associated with collective worship and celebrations with shared values .and all have a sacred character.

Kanis attribute human characteristics and behaviour to *Kalattuthamburan*, but not to any species or any object. That means their religious system follows anthropomorphism to a certain extent as defined by Robin Horton.[38] His in-depth anthropological study in an African context discards the evolutionary speculations of the nineteenth century intellectuals and their introspective methods. His views relate to the general characteristics of magic and religion, which he uses to compare traditional systems of magic and religion with Western thoughts and views of the world, both religious and scientific. For Horton the role of magic and religion in

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[36] Emilie Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 27.
[37] Emilie Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,* 45.
[38] Robin Horton, 'A Definition of Religion and its Uses', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 90,2 (1960), 201-226.

traditional societies is explanation, prediction and control.[39] Horton's way of perception is over shadowed with intellectualism which gives too much emphasis upon reason, conscience, reflection and intellectual processes.

Differing from the Intellectualist positions of Horton and Guthrie, Lawson and McCauley claim, from a varied neo-intellectualist position, that religion is essentially ritual. For Lawson and McCauley, the religious system is a symbolic-cultural system of ritual acts that go together with shared conceptual system which consists of culturally claimed superhuman agents.[40] I maintain that the Kanis approach to the sacred has nothing to do with magic even though they have limited scientific thinking about nature and its forces. They think logically and keep ecological consciousness as religious communities who live outside of their habitats. Their practical knowledge of the local environment and how to conduct an eco-friendly lifestyle is shown extensively in their rituals and are narrated in mantras and pujas. Their beliefs and practices are an integral part of living in their religio-cultural system with functional significance. Their culture lives in them through nature-oriented customs, laws, rituals and traditions.

5.4.2. Nature: Provider of Resources

The livelihood and lifestyle of the Kani are tied up with the land in a system of mutual reinforcement. Due to their harmonious relationship with their environment, they incorporate the spiritual and the material, the living and the non-living, into one integral whole. Since their understanding of nature is entwined with cultural practices, for them the environment is not a commodity to be exploited. Although these holistic concepts were verbally expressed by the interviewees, such concepts are evident in their myths and lifestyles.

For them land is divine and the protection of their land will provide them with everything, not only to the members of their community, but to the life system of their environment. They consider themselves to be the protectors of the forest land and have been preserving their living habitat and conserving their land for centuries. A crucial distinguishing feature of tribal society is their association with the territory to which they belong and the prudent use of resources of their local environment, which

[39] Robin Horton, 'African Traditional Thought and Western Science', in B. R. Wilson (ed), *Rationality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970).
[40] E. Thomson Lawson and Robert N. McCauley, *Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 5.

is sanctioned by their tradition.[41] "Land here means the land he lives on now, the trees and plants he relates himself with day and night, and even the whole earth."[42] "In the tribal culture, land is the abode of the 'Mother Earth.' Being a gift of God, it is not individualised, but shared in common."[43] It is strong belief among them that all living beings are children of the earth and hence they are not supposed to kill any animals in the forest. Soman explained his approach to wild animals which come to his agriculture field. He said that,

> I am experiencing wild animals' attacks in my agriculture field. But I am not complaining to the government authorities about its attacks. I think that they come to my agricultural field to eat food. We need food, and accordingly they also need for their survival. It is my opinion that for the existence of the earth we need to feed all animals. I give reverence to all animals and plants, because I give reverence to the spirit who dwells in all living and non-living beings.[44]

The relationship between the land and the resources they receive from cultivation is tied up with their religious practices. *Koduthi* is their religious ritual which is connected to their whole life, from birth to death, and in building up of their world views. This religious ritual sustains their life system by revealing their community consciousness and collective ownership of nature.

The Kanis practice of religious rituals preserves a collective social consciousness. John R. Brown refers to Durkheim's study of the *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, and explains the findings of the study that

> an early type of social consciousness in those societies where everyone is for all important purpose alike: everyone has the same statuses, duties, and role. In such societies people's feelings are also alike, and thus strongly reinforce each other whenever people gather together. Moral sentiments, religious beliefs, and other cultural ideas are all very strong, and law, religion, and social norms are strong as well.[45]

A collective social involvement is a feature of religious contexts, as religion is a collective reality. "Religious representations are collective representations that

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[41] Johnson Vadakuchery, "The Earth Mother and the Indigenous People of India" in The Journal of Dharma: XVIII, 1, 1993, 90.
[42] Nirmal Minz, 'Primal Religion's Perspective on Ecology' in Daniel D. Chetti (ed) *Ecology and Development* (Madras: Gurukul Theological College and Research Institute, 1991), 50.
[43] George Mathew Nalunnakkal, *Green Liberation: Towards an Integral Ecotheology* (Delhi: ISPCK/NCCI, 1999), 196.
[44] Soman, interviewed on 18/07/2015.
[45] John R. Brown, *Religions in Practice: An Approach to the Anthropology of religion* (New York: Pearson, 2005), 15.

express collective realities."[46] For Durkheim religion is something eminently social, and it consists of collective representations, which express collective realities through religious rituals, and shows the social affairs of religious categories and collective thoughts.[47] According to the Kanis' traditional form of sustenance their religious practices are indissolubly tied with nature. Their belief in nature as the provider of daily substance is clearly manifested in their rituals.

Durkheim is of the opinion that beliefs and rites are the main categories of religious phenomena. Beliefs are states of opinion and consist of representations, whilst rites consist of modes of actions. According to him the object of the rite is characterised in its moral practices, and the special nature of the object is expressed in the belief.[48] In all ritual practices Kanis affirm that *Kalattuthamburan* dwells in nature and the resources of nature are provided to all who pronounce mantra and practice rituals. The sense of collective ownership of the local environment and sharing the resources of nature through practicing various rituals are the manifestations of their community consciousness. "The tribal world view of collective ownership and sharing and co-operation in their jobs like agricultural works, and sharing of their produce is totally antithetical to the capitalist, market oriented, consumerist world view. Land is central to their life."[49] Land is spiritually attached to their daily sustenance, and they are obliged to preserve it with mutual care.

5.4.3. Sacred Knowledge and Secret Knowledge

Kanis believe that knowledge is sacred and it is transmitted from generation to generation. They are very particular in following the paths of ancestral wisdom and retain it by following the guidelines and instructions of the headman. Knowledge of treating various human diseases by using medicinal plants is one example of this traditional wisdom. In the recent past they used different medicinal plants to treat their physical illness and before the extension of primary health care programmes to their settlements they depended heavily on their traditional physicians and traditional healing rituals. Thankappan Kani said,

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[46] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 9.
[47] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*.
[48] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 34.
[49] George Mathew Nalunnakkal, *Green Liberation: Towards an Integral Ecotheology* (Delhi: ISPCK/NCCI, 1999), 197.

> My father taught me to make herbal medicine. Old generation transmitted its secret to the next generation, thus we have been using such medical wisdom generation after generation. When I suffer from fever, I collect leaves of *Adalodakam* and *Nochiyila,* and put them in a pot, and boil it with water. When it is boiled I take inhalation from its steam, and drink the water for three times, and fever will disappear from me quickly.[50]

The herbal knowledge of this tribal community influenced them to preserve a large number of wild plants on the mountain slopes and valleys of the forests. Their traditional wisdom regarding conservation and biodiversity resulted in an improvement of local livelihood support systems.

They call their physician 'Plathi,' and Plathi is a source of tribal medical wisdom. Their treatment pattern consists of traditional healing art which includes administration of various traditional medicinal drugs and some magico–religious mantras and rituals. The health tradition of the Kani tribes inhabiting the forests of the Western Ghats region of Kerala is comparatively healthy. Many of the older people whom I met during my field work seemed full of energy and active and most of them are still occupied in "Thozhil Urappu Padhathi" to earn money. There they do their manual work from 8.00am to 3.00pm and interestingly their life expectancy is more than that of the 'elite' communities who live outside of the tribal settlements. The herbal plant "Arogyapacha" is a unique example of the connection between their physical health and medicinal plants. The original name of this plant is *Trichopus zeylanicus,* which means the greener of health, provides very good health and vitality.[51] It is their traditional understanding that it is possible to survive completely healthily by eating its fruit without having any other food for some days. They eat a few fruits of this plant each day and do their work rigorously. From their long experience they advocate that the habit of eating this fruit daily, helps them to remain healthy, agile and young and because of this they are free from any chronic diseases.

In December 1987 P. Pushpangadan along with a group of All India Coordinated Research Project of Ethnobiology (AICRPE) unit of the Post graduate-cum-Research Centre in Ayurveda, Trivandrum made a trekking tour in the high

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[50] Thankppan Kani, interviewed on 18/07/2015.

[51] 'Arogyhappacha' has been identified now as *Trichopus zeylaniicus* Gaertn of the family Dioscoreaceae. This species has already been record from Agasthyar hills by Botanical Survey of India. P. Pushpanadan, S. Rajashekharan, P. K. Ratheshkumar & C. R. Jawahar, Arogypacha (Trichopus Zeylancius Gaerin): The Giving of Kani Tribes of Agasthyar Hills (Kerala) For Ever Green Health and Vitality, *Ancient Science of Life* VIII, 1 (1988).

mountainous forests of the Agasthyar hills where the Kani tribes dwell in scattered places. On their way up to the Agasthyar hills, most of the members of the AICRPE team became exhausted and at times felt great fatigue. However, the Kani guides who accompanied them seemed strong and were able to continue trekking without any health problems. The guides collected some small blackish fruits and ate them, before offering some to the other members of the group. Most of the researchers ate the fruits and what surprised them was that it gave them a sudden flush of great energy and strength. In their words,

> We could thereafter do the trekking at ease and with great spirit and enthusiasm. After experiencing the wonderful effect of those curious looking fruits, we asked the 'Kani men who were initially very reluctant to reveal the identity of the fruit by saying that it is a tribal secret, a sacred information that cannot to be revealed to any outsiders. They said that the use of this plant and many other traditional herbal practices followed by them are part of their sacred knowledge-system that were imparted to their great ancestors directly by saint Agastya – the mythical ancient saint who is considered to be the founder of Siddha Medicine and the Agasthyar hills, named after him, was his abode.[52]

The research team hoped that this wild plant used by the 'Kani' tribe could be used to treat that dreadful killer disease of human beings, namely Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome commonly known as AIDS.[53]

The traditional knowledge of this tribal community required them to preserve a large number of wild plants on the mountain slopes and valleys of the forests. Their traditional wisdom on conservation of biodiversity is evident in the improvement of local livelihood support systems and in their special attention to preserving the endangering species. Their ancestral wisdom, which is explained in historical accounts are manifested in their harmonious relationship with nature. They are indigenous communities living in their own territories, having their own myths and stories, committed to care for future generations by practising actions which will preserve their environment and ancestral territories. According to Martinez Cobo,

> Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the society now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at

[52] P. Pushpanadan, S. Rajashekharan, P. K. Ratheshkumar & C. R. Jawahar, 'Arogypacha (Trichopus Zeylancius Gaerin): The Giving of Kani Tribes of Agasthyar Hills (Kerala) For Ever Green Health and Vitality', *Ancient Science of Life* VIII, 1 (1988), 13-14

[53] P. Pushpanadan, S. Rajashekharan, P. K. Ratheshkumar & C. R. Jawahar, 'Arogypacha (Trichopus Zeylancius Gaerin): The Giving of Kani Tribes of Agasthyar Hills (Kerala) For Ever Green Health and Vitality', 16.

> present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems.[54]

Distinct from this definition the Kanis are highly open to sharing the resources they receive from their land with other communities, apart from their knowledge of physical and spiritual healing. In their living system there is a moral contract between their social living and conservation, which lies in their commitment to animate and inanimate beings. They interact with their resource base in a responsible manner, consuming minimum resources, minimising waste and pollution, and conserving to the maximum. This basic life style is common among the members of Kanis. Their knowledge system is rooted in their community living.

The indigenous knowledge of this small group of communities is embedded in their languages, rituals, and story-cycles, kinship systems, worldviews, relationship with the land and their local dwelling place.[55] By looking at the flowering and drying of bamboos trees Kanis can foresee the forthcoming weather, and plan the size of cultivation as part of taking precautions to overcome famine as it is their belief that bamboo flowering is a natural sign of impending famine. Ernst M. Conradie uses indigenous wisdom to explain the sense of community existing in nature. He argues that the retrieval of ecological wisdom of indigenous peoples could be a response to the economic process of fragmentation and the destruction of whole ecosystems. He finds that indigenous cultures' songs, legends, and rituals encompass the harmonious relationship between humanity and nature.

Traditional indigenous resource use systems are fundamental principles to the sustainable self-regulated system, and such wisdom is sensitive to ecological problems. Posey and Graham do not differ from this characteristic of indigenous wisdom, but at the same time they strongly claim that indigenous knowledge is not local knowledge, but part of the knowledge of the universal. In their words,

> Although indigenous knowledge is highly pragmatic and practical, indigenous people generally view this knowledge as emanating from a spiritual base: all creation is sacred, the sacred and the secular are inseparable, spirituality is

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[54] Martínez Cobo, J. 'Study of the problem of discrimination against indigenous populations', UN Sub-commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities, UN Doc. E/CN.4/ Sub.2/1986/7

[55] Sadruddin Aga Khan and Hassan bin Talal, *Indigenous Peoples, A Global quest for Justice: A Report for the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Affairs* (London: Zed, 1987).

> the highest form of consciousness, and spiritual consciousness is the highest form of awareness. In this sense, a dimension of indigenous knowledge is not local knowledge of the universal as expressed in the local.[56]

I would like to argue that Posey and Graham's claim is complicated when analysed in the light of the Kanis' religious rituals and practices. Their main ritual Koduthi is a purely locally formed one, which retains its unique spiritual values and community dimension.

5.5. Environmental Sustainability Practices of Kani Tribes

Tribal dwelling place, agricultural practices and resource management are the main expressions of the Kani Tribes' sustainable living system. Their houses, agriculture fields and worshipping places connect their life with nature. Their houses are small in size with simple structures, for that purpose they use renewable materials only, with little or no furniture. They do not want to build larger homes even though materials are freely available. The floors are made of mud and layered with cow dung, which gives a polished effect and absorbs any water which is spilled. They are normally always dry and look clean. The roof, which is water tight and made of thickly laid paddy straw and reeds, is replaced regularly and then recycled as manure. While most of the Kanis still follow this traditional method of house construction, some of them have adopted durability measures, and are now proficient in laying clay tiles and asbestos sheeting on roofs. However, such tribes do not want to construct big houses with toilets. Mateer gives a sustainable architectural account of a house of the Kani tribe. He writes,

> Their dwellings are very small, but neatly made of bamboos and the elephant reed (melocanna Rheedii), the leaves and stems being interwoven for walls as well as roof. Besides the huts on the ground, a number of booths are built on trees with large branches, a platform being made of sticks, and the hut built on this in order to be out of the way of mischievous elephants, tigers, &c. Access is obtained by a ladder or a single long bamboo with the side shoots cut off on either side at a distance of a few inches.[57]

In the inner tribal settlement area I could see the above mentioned style of house. Their houses are built like huts which consist of a single bed-room, a hall and kitchen with roof thatched with long reeds and grass and the walls are made of bamboo

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[56] Darrell A. Posey and Dutfield Graham, *Indigenous Peoples and Sustainability* (Gland, Switzerland: IUCN, 1996), 31.
[57] Samuel Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore*, 64.

splits. The interior part of the house therefore feels ‘air conditioned.’ The flooring is made from a mixture of water, cow dung and leaves from herbal plants which help it to maintain a good colour with a well-polished appearance.

I understand that the Kanis’ sustainable actions, in terms of their dwelling places, are indissolubly tied with their environmental ethics and they experience community living through their common living practices. Larry L. Rasmussen envisions the role of local communities and institutions in designing pragmatic sustainable visions, which include; sustaining livelihoods, working out agricultures appropriate to regions, preserving traditions and cultures, reviving religious life, maintaining human dignity, resisting the commodification of all things, launching eco-friendly technological innovations with renewable and non-renewable resources, revising urban designs and architecture, preserving biological specious and protecting ecosystems, and cultivating a sense of earth as a sacred good held in trust and in common.[58] Rasmussen’s view on sustainability involves proper guidance for actions and policies: maintaining the integrity of ecological systems in the process of meeting basic human needs, and conserving natural resources for the quality of life of all human and non-human beings; understanding cultural diversity and promoting local participation and empowerment; and pursuing social justice and equity.[59]

5.5.1. Sustainability: Resource Management ‘From Below’

In the Kani settlement people live in a uniformed sustainable way and follow an eco-friendly consistent lifestyle. They practice multiple cropping in their cultivation areas, which enables them to maximize food security. Their agricultural practices ensure sustainability even at the cost of low output and an immediate income. They are not bothered about maximizing their output in order to receive more income from it. This tendency is derived from their traditional understanding that their agricultural land should always have richness in biodiversity to ensure sustainable living of the future generations. The land provides for their regular sustenance in the form of root tubers such as Neduvan, Noora and Kavala and corms of yams, some of which are stored for the lean years. Vegetables such as greens, chilly, brinjal, ladies finger, long beans, small beans are cultivated in their backyard and different varieties of

[58] Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, 1996.351.
[59] Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, 1996.328.

pumpkin are trailed over their huts. Their mixed cropping system enables them to have food availability in all seasons. They believe that if one crop fails, due to the lack of rain or some other natural phenomenon, their mixed cropping system will ensure that one crop will serve as insurance for the other. It is this sustainable approach towards food security that ensures they never experience food scarcity. Referring to non-Western context Nothcott opines that,

> food scarcity is a daily reality in many parts of the non-Western world precisely because of the movement of so much land from traditional, low-impact, sustainable methods of farming for local human needs, to the exploitation of land for cash crops which do not feed local people and on land which is frequently unsuitable in the long-term for this kind of development.[60]

In the past the Kanis had intimate knowledge about their environment, and according to that level of knowledge and world view, they made their priorities, and through which they used their resources prudently. They generally consider that trees are the source of water, food, fertilizer, flowers etc. For them birds and wild animals are part of a living system which enriches their lives, hence they treat them with caution and concern. So even now when making decisions, they pay great attention to sustaining the relationship between animate and inanimate objects in their environment. Therefore the earth is their mother and they honour her with a deep concern of care for the earth. It is therefore evident that they maintain the balance between the environment and requirement, and from this environmental ethical understanding, they hold the resource sharing habit as a sign of their moral responsibility towards animate and inanimate objects.

5.5.2. Koduthi: An Indigenised Holistic Approach to Environmental Sustainability

Koduthi is a three day religious ritual which the Kanis conduct every year in *Vrichika Masam.* (*Vrichika Masam* is a Malayalam month in the Keralan calendar and falls between the end of November and middle of December). The members of the ten *Illams*, including small children, gather at their place of worshipping which is called Kavu. It is performed under the headmanship of Muttukani. He will begin this religious festival with puja. All members will join in various mantras and follow the guidelines of Muttukani. All adults and children, irrespective of age or gender, are

[60] Northcott, *The environment and Christian Ethics* 1996, 279

immersed in mantras and slowly they start to *thullal* (dance ecstatically). They wait for the presence of the spirit of *Kalattuthamburan*, believing that by performing puja and ecstatically dancing *Kalattuthamburan's* spirit will enter into a devotee's body. A person who has pleased the spirit of *Kalattuthamburan* will continue to dance ecstatically along with all members so that no one will know whose body *Kalattuthamburan* has entered. Babu Kani looked delighted while he was describing how they celebrate this religious ritual. He explained that all members of the tribal community bring their recently harvested agricultural produce such as yam, wild honey and wild flowers. ''We use only wild flowers for Puja, and we do not use any flowers or objects from outside. It is conducted inside the *Poomadam* (a tent fully covered by wild flowers). Once in three years only *Poomadam* is made. In the other two years Koduthi will be conducted without *Poomadam*. Poomadam has seven rooms constructed with plantain trunks as its poles. Each room is filled with our offering to god. While we are doing puja we pray to god and say about our petitions. During its concluding session *thullalkaran* (the one who is possessed by the power of *Kalattuthamburan*) distributes all offered items among the worshippers. What everyone asks for will be received by the *thullalkaran*. Once it is finished, all of them find out about the need of the one who is sitting near him/her, and sharing their resources with them. There will be no complaining, because we believe that our god gives things according to our need. This celebration ends with a great sense of community feeling of togetherness''. The feeling of togetherness of the members of the community and their willingness to consider that the resources of nature are for the mutual wellbeing of all is the centre of their environmental ethics. This ritual practice of the Kanis is an indigenised vision which displays an environmental consciousness.

Koduthi, being a religious ritual, reminds them of the practice of shifting cultivation. The practice of shifting cultivation involves moving from one place to another after three years of cultivation. They know that in the third year the yield from the land will be comparatively low. When they conduct puja in the third year, they celebrate it on a much larger scale. They bring more offerings in the form of different food products, which at the end of the puja are distributed equitably to the people by the *thullalkaran* in a mutual sharing of offerings. This equitable sharing of resources during the culmination of the puja has an ethical role because as well that the equal

division of produce it restricts them from the tendency of overconsuming the resources of nature.

I understand that *Koduthi* is being practiced as a religious ritual, but it encompasses ecological practices. Milton observes that, "Indigenous and traditional societies embrace a wide range of ecological practices, which generate a wide range of ecological practices, some of which are as ambiguous and contradictory as Western concepts of nature."[61] But in the life situation of the Kani tribes they are very religious and are willing to take up any challenges in order to keep their community togetherness and the vision of oneness with the nature. Religiously centred rituals, taboos, and social sanctions can be suggested to industrialised worlds if sustainability is placed at the centre of realistic possibilities.[62] Johnston says that "indigenous and traditional cultures have been spiritually instructive for many within the broad range of sustainability movements''.[63] Possey develops an idea based on indigenous cultures who, he maintains have a common perception that all of life, in some sense, is sacred.[64] Anthropologist Robin Wright highlights the struggles for existence of indigenous communities, and from the indigenous cultural locations he draws resources to build and rebuild viable, alternative futures and alternative visions for maintaining environmental sustainability.[65]

5.6. Invasion of 'From Above' and Changing Environment

A close analysis of religious practices of Kanis and their closeness to their environment poses some pertinent issues. A critical analysis based on a comparative study of their eco-centred life in the past and present reveals the greatness of the indigenous way of religious commitment to nature conservation and sustainable living, and the transition of their approach to sacred and sustainability. The cultural and geographical location of the Kani tribe and their ecological consciousness are currently under the threat of 'invasion from above' such as

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[61] Kay Milton, 'Nature and the Environment in Indigenous and Traditional Cultures' in David E. Cooper and Joy A. Palmer (eds) *Spirit of the Environment: Religion, Value and Environmental Concern* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 98.
[62] Fikret *Berkes*,Carl *Folke*,Johan *Colding, Linking Social and Ecological Systems: Management Practices and Social Mechanisms for Building Resilience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
[63] Lucas F. Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability: Social Movements and the Politics of the Environment,* 183
[64] Darrel A. Posey, *Indigenous Knowledge and Ethics: A Darrell Posey Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 64.
[65] Robin Wright, 'Anthropological Presuppositions of Indigenous Advocacy', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 17, (1988), 365-90.

enforced changes in agricultural practices by the government, forest laws and Hindu religious influence. Some of the issues are briefly discussed below.

5.6.1. Reinforced Changes in Agricultural Practices

There is a vast change in their mode of cultivation. Shifting cultivation has already been replaced by settled agriculture and it has created a sense of dependency on monocrops among them. Monoculture plantations are changing their local environment as such plantations, reduce the fertility of the land which therefore affects many other life species through loss of habitat. Sarasu, an old lady in the Kani colony said that, "due to the modern agricultural procedures our traditional mode of cultivation has been disappeared."[66] Northcott is of the opinion that through monocrop farming, expanding energy consumption, and the development and homogenization of land, wealthy and powerful human beings have caused unprecedented reductions in the variety of life around us.[67] As we turn fertile ground into large-scale, industrial farms growing only a single crop, the variety of plant life in our ecosystem shrinks.[68] Rich outsiders take their land for lease for two to five years for the purpose of mono-cropping. Although they have land of their own, they are not allowed to reap the benefit of their properties. The Kanis now realise because the rich took away the crops and the right to preserve the nutritious condition of the soil, the land will yield less food and that they face starvation.

The Kanis enjoyed self-sufficiency in the past and were particular in providing this sufficiency to all animate and inanimate objects in their environment. Their vision of development is different from modern development systems as they believe that development should never destroy the environment. Parappan Kani passionately expressed his disagreement regarding present patterns of development which are affecting his environment.

He said,

> In our habitat we had freedom and we had enjoyed this freedom with great responsibilities. During the period of Maharaja, he entrusted us to protect this forest land which we protected carefully and sincerely. Though we had been hunting, we were not giving attention to kill animals. We were protecting

[66] Sarasu, interviewed on 19/08/2015.
[67] Kevin J. O'Brien, *An Ethics of Biodiversity Christianity, Ecology and the Variety of Life* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 2.
[68] Kevin J. O'Brien, *An Ethics of Biodiversity Christianity, Ecology and the Variety of Life* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 5.

> elephants. There were many incidents when outsiders came into our forest to kill elephants and collect tusks. But we did not allow such people to enter into the forest. Now the forest officers have constructed many houses here and there, built roads and fences. This is what they are doing now after destroying the forest. So how will our environment survive? It is my request, people like you should petition the Indian Prime Minister to protect our forest. They are spending millions of money and wasting all of it in the name of development. Development work should not be done here. This is Kani pattu (dwelling place of Kani tribe), given by Maharaja.[69]

Due to external influences on their environment many species have become extinct as their ecosystem is weakened. The replacement of crop diversity by monoculture is on the increase and their sustainable living system is under ecological threat. When biodiversity is lost from a place where previously mutual interdependence prevailed, environmental injustices arise and the inhabitant's economic condition is weak.

5.6.2. Regulation of Forest Laws

Kanis' local social structures have become weaker in proportion to their growing dependence on the Forestry Department and other sources for their survival. Anuradha observes that, "Traditionally, the Muttukani combined the roles of the law giver, protector and dispenser of justice, physician and priest. However, over time the traditional system of governance among the Kanis has been eroded to a large extent and the role of the tribal chief is only a token one."[70] In the course of time the significance of following rituals and traditional practices is not being continued in its complete sense. At present, in order to meet their daily sustenance, the adult members of this tribe go to work in the "Thozhil Urappu Padhathi", which is a programme initiated by the Central Government of India in order to eradicate poverty among the rural communities. It compels them to leave their traditional handicraft centred professions and the practice of indigenised methods of agricultural. In addition, the Forestry Department determines the needs of the local environment which therefore restricts the choices of the Kanis. Acting on advice given by the Agricultural Extension Officer the Forestry Department has introduced new methods of cultivation. In the past local natives determined what should be cultivated, planted and harvested and their decisions directly affected their

[69] Parappan Kani, interviewed on 18/07/2015
[70] R. V. Anuradha, Sharing With Kanis: A case study from Kerala (New Delhi: Kalpvriksha Mimeo, 1998) http://www.iimahd.ernet.in/publications/data/2002-08-02AnilKGupta.pdf, viewed on 02/09/2016

community strength and traditional knowledge. Today, however, the role of the Forestry Department in determining their choices is quite evident even to a casual visitor. Today the condition of their life is witness to a decline in their commitment to the preservation of their religious and environmental values which was once a symbol of their sustainable living. This, I believe, is due to an invasion of ideas and ideologies which have infiltrated settlements in various forms.

5.6.3. Invasion of Modernisation and Dominant Religious Tradition

Although Kanis were a nomadic community, today all of them have been settled in a permanent place for a long time. They are part of the socio-cultural and religious changes of previous times, but are now increasingly being affected by the modernising process. Longkumer claims that the process of modernisation is associated with the abandonment of traditional religious and cultural practices in favour of the economic and scientific notions rooted in post-enlightenment ideologies.[71] Larry L. Rasmussen explains such interference as an obstacle to environmental sustainability. “It is not rooted in the earth and does not listen to it. It is as virile, comprehensive, and alluring as a materialist way of life, but it has gone-deaf to earth’s requirements for comprehensive sustainability. Its notion of wealth and value do not include cultural wealth or biological value. It is nature-blind and turns resources into profit without bothering to track the origins of goods and services in nature or the consequences of their use for nature.”[72]

Gadgil and Chandran reveal one of the aspects of the invasion of the dominant religious tradition in India with regard to the disappearance of sacred groves of the indigenous communities. According to them, “Another insidious threat resulting in clearance of sacred groves is the identification of the wild woodland spirits and deities of the pre-Brahminic societies with the gods of the Hindu pantheon. This has resulted in the installation of idols of the Hindu gods in the groves or the deities of the groves are made minions of the Hindu gods. Often this is followed by temple construction after fully or partially clearing the vegetation.”[73] I saw a similar type of religious invasion when I visited the sacred grove and temple of the Kani settlement colony in that the style of their worshipping centre now bears witness

[71] Arkotong Longkumer, "Cleanliness is next to Godliness": Religious change, hygiene and the renewal of Heraka Villages in Assam' *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 45, 2 (2011).
[72] Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, 1996.350.
[73] Madhav Gadgil and Subhash Chandran, 'Sacred Groves’ *India International Quarterly* 19/1-2 (1992), 187.

to the arrival of the images of the Hindu Gods and goddesses. They are under a continuous invasion 'from above,' and the Kanis' life system, which is under threat from current external forces, will be unable to hold onto the praxis centred steps which conserve environmental sustainability. However, the concept of the sacred concealed in the cultural and social practices of the Kani tribe have ecological and ethical meaning. I would argue that the Kani spirituality which has survived even in the midst of the 'invasion from above' can offer more theological resources to Indian religious environmentalism.

5. 7. The Relationship Between Kani Spirituality & Practices and Protestant Christianity

Kani spirituality and practices consist of a rich ecological behaviour, most of which can be observed though their agricultural practices and during festival occasions. The visit to some of the farmers of the CSI church gave me first-hand knowledge of how the ecological behaviour of Protestant Christianity is related to the spirituality and practices of the Kani tribal community.

5. 7. 1. Cultivation as Nature Conservation

Among indigenous communities, people and biodiversity are strongly interrelated within social ecological systems or human – environment systems.[74] This interrelationship is sustained by the ecological conservation which is maintained by certain practices. People, biodiversity and nature are inextricably tied together in ecological conservation. Although old practices like shifting cultivation among the Kani community is not practiced at present, their ecological behaviour is still evident in present patterns of cultivation. As discussed in page 129 the Kani community believes in the purification practice for maintaining biodiversity. A similar approach can be found among CSI Keralan Christians. Selvaraj explained about an old land clearing practice he does even now. He said that, "Before starting cultivation I prepared that land by removing all bushes and mulches and burning them. After that I spread its ash on the cultivation area. I had been told by my father that through this

[74] Fikret Berkes, Carl Folke, *Linking Social and Ecological Systems: Management Practices and Social Mechanisms for Building Resilience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press:2000); Jianguo Liu, Thomas Dietz, Stephen R. Carpenter, Marina Alberti,4 Carl Folke, et all., Complexity of Coupled Human and Natural Systems, *Science* 317(2007):1513–1516; Eliner Ostrom, A general framework for analysing sustainability of social-ecological systems. *Science* 325 (2009):419–422.

land clearing practice we purify the biodiversity of the soil and nature. This land clearing is followed by a prayer by the priest or the evangelist as we believe that purification of the land and cultivation through ecological conservation is a sacred act."[75] The Protestant cultivation practice is ecologically connected and mirrored by the cultivation practice of the Kani communities, both of whom reveal the ecological behaviour of communities who conserve the natural world.

5. 7. 2. Traditional Knowledge and Health Care

The Kani community lives in harmony with nature and they extensively use medicinal plants for treating different illness. The traditional knowledge and practice of conservation and use of medicinal plants is common among this community with each household maintaining different medicinal and aromatic plants in their croft. This practice offers not only physical well-being to them but also helps maintain bioresource conservation and the social well-being of the community. Similar practices are common among CSI Christians in Kerala. Navarapacha (Plectranthus ambonicus), Peruvalam (Clerodendrum viscosum Vent), Karinochi (Vitex negundo), Sathaveri (Protasparagus racemosus), Garudakodi (Aristolochia indica), Kantharimulaku (Capsicum frutescens), Manjal (Curcuma longa), keezharnelli (Phyllanthus urinaria) and Adalodakam (Justicia adhatoda) are some of the medicinal plants I observed in the home gardens of CSI Christians and the Kani community. Arogyapacha (Trichopus zeylanicus Gaertn) is seen in most of the Kani home gardens.

5. 7. 3. Festivals: Koduthi and Adhybhala Perunal

The Keralan Christian agricultural related practices of offering resembles the food grain sharing in the *Koduthi* celebration of Kani tribal communities. The agricultural season of these two traditions ends with the offering and sharing of different food grains. The Christian communities make achappam, Kuzhalappam, kozhukatta, neyyappam and give them as offerings to the church to celebrate Adhyabhala Perunal (celebration of the first harvest). During this celebration rice, tubers, coconut, banana and tapioca are brought to the church. Offerings are being made to give thanks to the Creator God for protecting their crops and blessing them through God's

[75] Selvaraj, Interviewed on 21/07/2015

creations. In the village churches, domestic animals are also offered to the church. All offerings are seen as a sign of their faith affirmation that creation belongs to the Creator God and the creation manifests the Creator on it. The sharing of offerings reminds the members of the church to care for nature and share the resources by looking maintaining sustainable living system.

Koduthi is celebrated among the Kani community as a sign of the spiritual commitment to care for nature and people. Singing, dancing, offering and sharing are part of this long celebration. These are intimately and integrally related in this ritual to find joy in their limited access to livelihood. Though poverty and indigence are seen in their daily life, greed for material possession is controlled by their commitment to the preservation of nature. The tribal ecological behaviour is conditioned by equality and community life, and the surrounding ecological condition is shaped by their spirituality. The *Koduthi* festival is a sacred moment to renew their covenant with nature and human the community. The *Adhyabhala Perunal* of the East Kerala Diocese reflects the remembrance of the Mala Araya Christian community's traditional ritual known as Malayoottu Mamankam (a celebration of feeding the hills). Jose Peter, a Mala Araya activist and a member of the East Kerala Diocese said that, "The *Adhyabhala Perunal* we celebrate with traditional reverence as it is connected with our pre-Christian ritual of *Malayootu Mamankam*. Our ancestors worshiped nature and the spirit of our ancestors. Therefore after their harvest they offered the first fruit of all crops and fed their hills and the members of their community. Therefore, in our church we celebrate *Adhayabhala Perunal* as an expression of the sacramental unity between human and nature."[76] The Christian community in Kerala today celebrates the harvest festival with environmental programmes such as tree planting, the cleaning of church compounds and by conducting environmental seminars.

5. 7. 4. Sacred Place as an Abode of Human-Nature Community

For Kanis there is no distinction between the sacred and the profane or even between nature and human. They believe that Kalattuthamburan is the spirit of their ancestor and nature. Therefore they have no human images in their place of worship but display images of non-living beings such as stones believing that the spirits of all

[76] Jose Peter interviewed on 22/07/2015

living and non-living beings need an abode in nature, which is close to human habitation. I saw images such as stones and pieces of wood in their sacred grove, which reflects their indissoluble relationship between ecological behaviour and sacred tradition. In addition to this strong ecological foundation they find their dwelling place to be the sacred abode to maintain and sustain nature-human relationship.

Similarly, the CSI Christians in Kerala see their environment as a sacred habitation. For example, when faith communities settle in a new place, they believe that this place is the scared place where God dwells, and this consciousness compels them to build a holy sanctuary. In the previous chapter this idea was highlighted in my discussion regarding the integral value of sacred tradition in the building up the scared environment, the sacred place and an ecological consciousness. Caring for nature emerges from their understanding that the human community lives in the sacred abode along with the cosmic community.

5.7.5. Nature as the Body of God

The Kani communities believe that the spirit of *Kalattuthamburan* dwells in nature. They adore nature and protect it by the deeply rooted understanding that their ancestral spirit dwells in the objects of nature. This traditional belief is transmitted from one generation to another which qualifies their land and all the inhabitants on it as sacred entities. Their faith in the spirit of *Kalattuthamburan* is a religious experience and a cosmological understanding. They understand the moving of the rhythms of the earth from nature, which is the body of *Kalattuthamburan*. Parappan Kani said that, “Our residential area is surrounded by mountains, and in which we see many small and big animals, different trees, small springs and fish. All of them manifest the presence of *Kalattuthamburan*. Therefore, we do not harm them, and we consume them minimally, only according to our need”[77] The revelation of God in nature is also a common understanding among the CSI Christians in Kerala. The Christian commitment to care for nature, which is articulated among faith communities understood from the belief that the entire universe is God’s body. The liturgical expressions of the CSI Christians affirm in their worship is that the image of God is revealed in creation. It is understood that seeing nature as the body of God

[77] Parappan Kani, interviewed on 18/07/2015

has similarity among the indigenous traditions and the CSI Christians in Kerala, although the Kani tribe hold their faith in *Kalattuthamburan* and the CSI Christians hold their faith in the Creator God.

5. 8. Conclusion

The ecological behaviour of the Kani tribe is reflected in the ecological consciousness of the CSI Christian communities in Kerala. Both traditions' ecological perspective is grounded upon the belief that nature is scared and provides daily sustenance and offers sacred wisdom, a wisdom which heals physically, ecologically and socially. The ecological landscape of the Kani tribe and the Christian communities reveal that the relationship between human beings and nature is maintained and sustained by the sacred approach to nature. For the Kani communities the land, all living beings and non-living beings are the dwelling place of *Kalattuthamburan,* and this is a centre of their spirituality as they see the image of the spirit of *Kalattuthamburan* in all beings. For them all objects seen in nature are manifestations of the body of *Kalattuthamburan*. It is understood that the concept of sustainable living practices emerges "from below" which is associated with their ecological behaviour. *Koduthi* is celebrated collectively as a symbol of sacred ritual, which nurtures the interconnectedness of their life and the existence of the environment. The social and religious significance of the *Koduthi* ritual provides a sustainable living system for the members of the community. Although environmental concerns are well expressed in the Kani settlement colony in Puravimala, it is clearly understood that the environmental voice "from below" is not being heard due to the "invasions from above."

The concepts of sustainable living practices emerge 'from below,' through their rituals, practices and struggles. Environmentalism "from below" consists of the sacredness of all living and non-living beings and the struggles to maintain a better environment. I maintain that the issues relating to the existence of the communities whose life is inseparably tied with nature must be addressed through the perspective of the environmentalism "from below," which is a major concern of the Christian communities. Therefore, the next chapter is concerned with the Christian faith communities' environmental commitment to sustainable living for the victims of environmental problems. This is based on the perspective of environmentalism "from below."

Chapter 6

Understanding and Responding to Environmental Problems: A Discourse of Christian Environmentalism "from Below"

6.1. Introduction

In religious environmentalism, the approach to environmental sustainability consists of the human commitment to the restoration of creation and the environmental activism of the victims of environmental problems. The voices of the environmental victims emerge from the faith expressions that creation belongs to God and God's justice is extended to all living and non-living beings. The Church hears the cry of the environmental victims and aims at creating a better environment. The Church's commitment to care for nature and the poor, formulates environmental activism and churches have used religion as a medium to influence local communities with positive effects. The CSI Christians in Kerala manifest their commitment to care for nature and victims of the environmental problems by leading environmental activism at ecclesial and institutional levels. Their sacred approach to nature and their praxis centred environmental concerns elaborate a discourse of environmentalism "from below." The environmental concerns of the members of the local parishes are well expressed in their social commitment to wider communities in different forms of actions, all of which convey a message of sustainable living. There is a strong missional emphasise in the dioceses that environmental action is to be considered as social action. The dimension of social action has emerged from the understanding of concerns for justice by the church. However, some members of the church consider people first in all their attempts to protect the environment.

The central discussion in this chapter is based on the voice of the environmental victims. I call their voice "environmentalism from below." The voice of the environmental victims is analysed in this chapter as a categorical tool based on the principle of environmental justice to further a theology of environmental sustainability. Theological findings which have emerged from this analysis are discussed systematically in the next chapter in the light of the interviews, writings of Indian Christian eco-theologians and various materials from the CSI dioceses in

Kerala. The sacred approach to environmentalism poses the unanswered question regarding the environmentalism of the poor from the analysis based on my fieldwork data from Kollam Kottarakara Dioceses.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of environmental activism. The discourse of environmental activism has emerged from the church's understanding and teachings of justice. I have explored Christian environmental activism and the principles of environmental justice by analysing two issues. The first one is connected with the waste disposal issue in Thiruvananthapuram and the second one is located in the East Kerala Diocese in connection with Christian response to the Kasturirangan Commission Report. The concept of environmental justice has created a background where the cries of the poor and the question of the environmentalism of the poor can be heard. The third example of environmental activism is an analysis of the 'people first' approach in connection with the approach of the poor people who work in the English India Clays Limited in Mangalpuram, Thiruvananthapuram which is in the area of Kollam Kottarakara Diocese.

6.2. Environmental Activism: An Expression of Environmental Justice

Environmental activism is linked with the Christian understanding of justice. Environmental justice is understood on the basis of the relationship between creation and the worshipful presence of the creator God. Bishop Samuel Amirtham who was the Bishop of the South Kerala Diocese from 1990 to 1997 was keen on introducing environmental concerns through his messages (Bishop's Message in Christava Deepika, a monthly journal published in the South Kerala Diocese), sermons and various articles. For him Christian environmentalism is all about God's justice to all creations.[1] His environmental concerns are profoundly mixed with justice concerns which directs one to know his/her local environment in order to discern what is happening to communities, to the natural environment, and to the land in which all living and non-living beings exist. He was very particular in bringing together the struggles of the environmental victims and justice concerns for maintaining biodiversity in local environments. For him social equity and ecological democracy are vital elements in cementing environmental concerns and activism.[2] Based on these theological and missional articulations he empowered the members of the

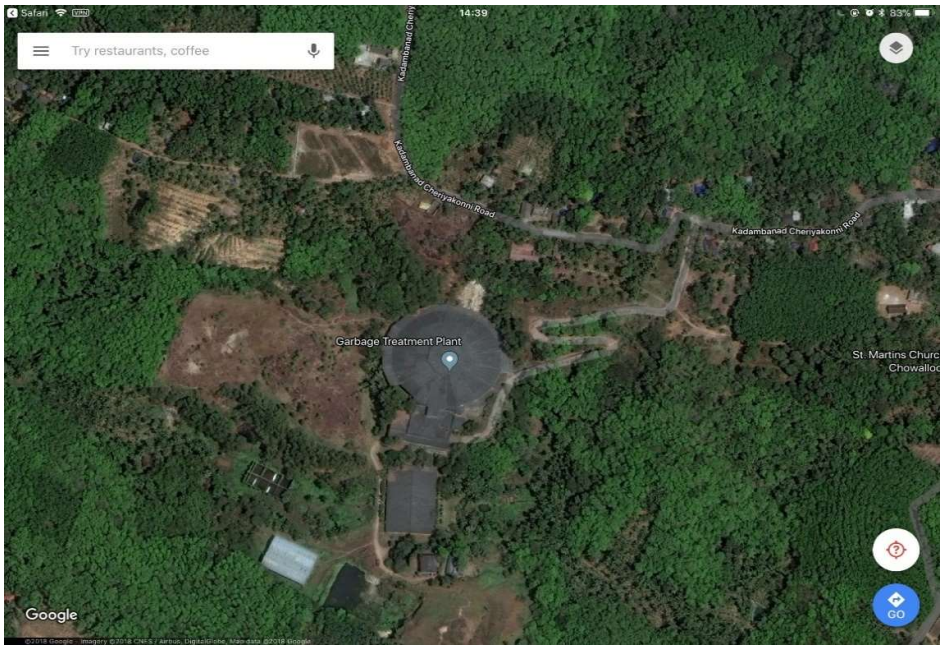
[1] Samuel Amirtham, "Bishop's Letter' *Christhava Deepika*, 3, 1993, 3.
[2] Amirtham, "Bishop's Letter' *Christhava Deepika*, 4. 1996, 6,

local churches near Vilappilsala waste disposal factory which is 10 miles from Thiruvananthapuram city.

6.2.1. People's Protest Against Vilappilsala Waste Decomposing Plant: A Social Activism of Environmental Justice

Vilappilsala Waste Decomposing Plant represented a severe environmental problem in the Diocesan area. I visited this location and interviewed the members of the group who protested against the plant. Vilappilsala, located about 15 Kilometres away from Thiruvananthapuram city has six CSI churches and four evangelical churches in the village. People who live in this village belong to the socially and economically weaker sections of society. Although members of other faiths also reside in the village, it is the Christians who live closest to the plant. The village was selected in 2000 for the dumping of urban solid waste generated from Thiruvananthapuram city. Since then approximately 80% of the waste generated in Thiruvananthapuram was being transported to this plant in Vilappilsala village. The city corporation brought an average of 300 tons to the plant but the installed capacity of the plant was about 157 tons. As a result it was impossible to process such huge amounts of garbage at the plant. The area of the dump site therefore increased due to this shortfall in the capacity of the plant. This uncontrolled dumping created health hazards for local residents as respiratory illness increased 100 fold from the pre-installation of the plant. The church secretary of the CSI Kadambanadu church said that there is not a single household which has not experienced respiratory illnesses and skin disease due to the waste processing plant and the adjoining dumpsite.[3] As pits were dug and filled with the waste in the plant area, leachate began to flow from the landfill. The leachate was collected in temporary ponds and disposed of after the addition of alum, lime and bleaching powder. The temporary measures were inadequate to handle the leachate as it flows into the nearby stream and reaches the Karamana river through Meenampally canal, causing river pollution.

[3] K. P. John, interviewed on 19/07/1015.



The plant was designed by the city corporation with the objective of installing well equipped modern processing facilities to generate fertilizer from the biodegradable waste and leachate treatment. The capacity of the installed plant (157 tons) and the waste that arrived from the city to the plant (300 tons) generated an uncontrollable problem, and because of this the plant could not treat the waste properly and scientifically. As a result of this, the area of the dump site also increased. This uncontrolled dump site constituted a major health hazard for local residents.[4] People who are economically and socially marginal and living in marginal environments are often paid less attention to by the systems that have economic and political power.[5]

Gnanadhas, who was one of the leading members of the Janakeeya Samithi (People's Movement) explained how it started and how it became a disaster. He said,

> The plant was made on a wet land which was between two small mountains, Eda Mala and Kanikanum Mala. They changed the natural shape of the mountains and the wet land by levelling the land. The wet land was used to cultivate rice. There was a beautiful stream flowing which was used by villagers for drinking and cooking. The stream was covered by layers of soil from the mountain. Although the plant was functioning properly by segregating plastics and other wastes, later it was all dumped together in big pits, from which leachates began to pollute the river and the ground water. It caused

[4] https://ejatlas.org/conflict/vilappilsala-waste-plant-vilappilsala-kerala-india, viewed on 19/09/2015
[5] Piers Blaikie and H Brookfield, *Land Degradation and Society* (London: Longman, 1987), 21-23.

> severe health problems like skin disease, respiratory disease and other diseases to people living in nearby areas.[6]

He showed me a person who lost the big toe of his right foot.

People took part in the agitation movement and formed Janakeeya Smithi (people's movement). They gathered together to fight against the plant without the support of any political parties. About five thousand people including children, young people and women congregated one and a half miles near the plant in order to stop the trucks which brought waste from the Corporation. Not only did the members of this church, but all nearby CSI churches and people from other religions participated in this protest. In 2012 this plant was finally closed down.

6.2.2. Environmental Justice Concerns from Faith Communities and Its Dissemination to Wider Communities

The initial step of the resistance toward the Vilappilsala Waste Disposal Plant was theologically propagated by a CSI Bishop who spoke about environmental justice and care for the local environment. He took personal interest by urging the appropriate government authorities to withdraw the proposal to install the waste disposal unit in a place inhabited by poor people. K. P. John who was the secretary of the CSI Kadambanadu church, recollected the valuable role his bishop played in bringing this theologically and in dealing with this issue pragmatically. Theologically, the issue was discussed on the basis of justice principles at both an individual level and community level.

Empowered by the Bishop Samuel Amirtham, Japagnanam, a minister of the South Kerala Diocese demonstrated his environmental awareness regarding the consequences of the Vilappilsala waste disposal factory, which was located close to

[6] Gnanadhas, interviewed on 19/07/2015

the church (CSI Kadambanadu Parish Church) where he was ministering. In 1999 he began his resistance to the proposed project which at the time was not attracting much attention or concern even from within the church. This land was acquired by the Kerala State government in 1995 to make a waste treatment plant for the city corporation's use. However, Japagnanam's sermons and door to door campaigning helped the members of his congregation to speak about its consequences to the secular community.

Christian communities were very firm in standing together with people of other faiths in expressing their faith background which is rooted in justice to the victims. The protest against the plant came to a head in December 2011 when the Janakeeya Samity started to block all vehicles bringing waste from the city to the plant. Since thousands of people came forward to participate in the protest, political leaders and the officers from the local government body argued that the protest was not against the plant, but against the Christians who were planning Christmas celebrations. The Christian communities however stood for justice and had attended the protest in numbers. A leaflet circulated by the People's Protest Movement on 28th May 2015, acknowledged this brave missional effort of Christians in standing shoulder to shoulder with other religious communities in order to bring justice to their environmental location. The leaflet says,

> When the People's Protest Movement declared to stop the garbage vehicles which were bringing waste from the city all religious communities joined with more enthusiasm and confidence. People set aside their religious and political affiliations and started to stop big trucks which brought waste from the city from 21st December, 2011. The opponents propagated that The People's Protest Movement has a hidden agenda to undermine Christmas celebrations. But the Christians did not accommodate that propaganda, and through which the protest got rid of such influences.[7]

For the members of the church the issue was an issue of justice. The justice concern of the church is tied to the protection of the quality of the environment and the neighbourhood. Subhash, a co-ordinator of the Janakeeya Samity said that,

> we started our protest for justice. The environmental injustice of the rich has made us environmental victims. Our fight is always for justice. Thousands of people from all religious traditions participated. Pregnant women participated. Young ladies brought their small kids from the realisation that if they are not aware of their justice their future would be disrupted.[8]

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[7] Third Anniversary of the Success of the Resistance, Leaflet issued on 28/05/2015
[8] Subhash, interviewed on 19/07/2015

The issue was considered by the people who live in the area of the Vilappilsala Plant as an issue of environmental injustice to the poor. It is understood that the disparate care for quality environment and power leads to correlative social upheaval and the unequal distribution of environmental degradation. Communities who lead comfortable lives in the city do not heed to the environmental well-being of poor communities. Healthy environment is a hope of the environmental victims and their hope toward a sustainable living is strengthened by their justice concerns. Jayaraj Saji, an ordained minister of the CSI South Kerala Diocese who closely watched the issue in Vilappilsala said to me that the Christian approach to the environmental degradation of Vilappilsala has to be understood as an Environmental issue. He said that,

> Here in Thiruvananthapuram, the people who are living in the city are having a very luxurious life and all the waste created out of this luxurious life are dumped in a village where a group of people are suffering. If you visit there, you will see that the life over there is a kind of pathetic. People are suffering in many ways. Especially it is said that their land values have gone down. Nobody goes there to purchase a piece of land. Even if they wanted to sell a property it is not possible. And their daughters are not been married because marriage alliances are not made between the people over there. In every area of their life everything is affected by this problem. That is injustice. We call it injustice. Even when we talk about environmental justice, it is mainly a proper for allocation of resource. It is not only the proper allocation of resources, but at the same time how we manage the resources, the facilities. Here a group of people are suffering and at the cost of this suffering a group of people are enjoying. That is absolutely injustice, and we can never stand for that.[9]

From the views of the faith community of the South Kerala Diocese, it is argued that a community in crisis can take understandable and creative steps to critically analyse their surroundings in the light of justice principles and the quality of local environment. For the Christians who participated in the People's Protest Movement the environment is a place in which they live, work and worship, and a place for maintaining quality life and justice. Considering the environmental justice consciousness of the Christian community who participated in the struggle for justice, I would argue that ecojustice emanating from sacred places can bring about justice to all sections of human society and all other living and non-beings.

Justice is a prime message of the worship and ministry of the church. As Northcott demonstrates the Christian view of justice is manifested in the worship of

[9] Jayaraj Saji, interviewed on 22/07/2015

the just God. He opines that, "Christian communities, local churches, are places where this God of Justice is worshipped and adored, and where God's reign of justice is looked for and evoked."[10] He inspires us to consider the world as a parish to keep justice active and to keep the integrity of creation.[11] Justice means being held responsible for the suffering we cause to others.[12] In the light of this justice concern we are responsible for our actions – actions which ensure a decent quality of life. Christians who are witness to the justice of God have to remember environmental responsibility, and should respond creatively to the environmental crisis.[13] The justice of God conveyed by sacred places illuminates crucial intersections between environmental and social justice concerns. The poor, who face the most environmental hazards, often become victims of the environmental crisis because they belong to economically and politically disenfranchised communities. The resistance of environmental victims emerges 'from below' which defines their environmental experience with the understanding that what they experience today in the form of the destruction of their living habitat is environmental injustice. The ecological experience of the disrupted environment and the experience of environmental injustice formulate environmentalism of the poor. Standing firmly for the Christian principles of environmental justice, the faith communities of the CSI dioceses in Kerala reveal environmental justice centred environmentalism of the poor.

6.3. Environmentalism of the Poor: A Discourse of Environmentalism 'From Below'

Environmentalism of the poor arises from a situation where the survival of the poor and their relationship with nature is questioned and threatened by the extraneous interference of exploitative powers. The emerging voice of the poor is based on the realisation that the ecological habitat of the poor is the centre of their survival and all other living and non-living beings. This is the major finding I drew from the struggles of the poor CSI Christian communities who live in the mountain ranges of the southern Western Ghats which is situated in Kerala. The CSI members

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[10] Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, 1996, 326.
[11] Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, 1996, 327.
[12] David G. Hallman, 'Climate Justice – The Role of Religion in Addressing Climate Change' in Mathew Koshy Punnackadu (ed) *God is Green* (Chennai, CSI Synod, n.d), 23.
[13] Michael S. Northcott, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming*, 2007, 281.

who are calling for the protection of the environment affirm that care for the environment is not a matter of luxury, but a reality of survival for all living and non-living beings which is linked with sustainable relationship. The environmental discourse lies at the experiential and contextual reality of the wounded living and non-living beings, and a pragmatic environmentalism emerges from that 'below' dimension. This argument is formed from the environmental response of CSI church members who are actively engaging for the poor in the Ecologically Sensitive Areas in the southern area of the Western Ghats.

6.3.1. Protest Against the Kasturirangan Commission Report and the Environmental Voice of the Poor

The majority of the churches of the East Kerala Diocese are geographically spread in the highlands in Idukki District, which is situated in the southern area of Western Ghats. The most populous Christians in this area are Catholic Christians. Protestant Christians are comparatively poor and have limited land to live on and cultivate. People living in this area are taking part collectively in the protest against the Kasturirangan Commission, which was appointed by the Central Government of India in order to protect the rich biodiversity of Western Ghats. In general, the Western Ghats are a biological treasure trove with a high degree of endemism (11% to 78%). Its mountain ranges represent geomorphic features of enormous importance with unique biophysical and ecological process, whilst its high mountain forest ecosystems influence the monsoon weather pattern. According to UNESO the mountain ranges of the Ghats present one of the best examples of the monsoon system on the planet. It also has an exceptionally high level of biological diversity, and its forests give shelter and habitat to at least 325 globally threatened flora, fauna, bird, amphibian, reptile and fish species.[14] This unique eco-system has been threatened by continuously increasing habitat pressures and due to this reason these regions have been declared to be one of the world's hotspots of biodiversity loss.

Realising the need to protect and rejuvenate the ecology of and for sustainable development in the Western Ghats, the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) appointed a committee with Prof. Madhav Gadgil as its Chairman in

[14] http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1342, viewed on 11/06/2016

March 2010 with the aim of assessing the current ecological situation of the Western Ghats and suggesting measures for rejuvenating it. The Gadgil committee, known as Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP), demarcated the entire Western Ghats into 3 zones, recommending varying degrees of control on human activity in each zone and claiming that development and conservation go hand-in-hand. The committee made assurances regarding democratic and transparent systems allowing and empowering local people to decide their own development options. It also proposed to demarcate ecologically sensitive zones and suggest measures to conserve protect and rejuvenate the ecology of the Western Ghats region.

However, there was heavy resistance to the WGEEP's proposals initiated by farmers, political parties, local communities and churches. Due to this widespread criticism, the MoEF constituted the Kasturirangan committee which is known as High Level Working Group (HLWG) to examine the Gadgil report in a holistic fashion and to submit an action plan to implement the report. This committee also submitted its own report, demarcating 40 percent of the Western Ghats area as an ecologically sensitive zone and imposing restrictions on human activity including agriculture, mining and quarrying. The HLWG suggests that there should not be any projects which could devastate the biodiversity in ecologically sensitive areas, but at the same time it speaks about the need of the eco-friendly development for the livelihood of the local people and their economic development.[15]

The objective of the formation of the HLWG was to suggest an all-round and holistic approach for sustainable and equitable development while keeping in focus the preservation and conservation of ecological systems in the Western Ghats.[16] It suggested certain restrictions in proposed ecologically sensitive areas. In order to control the interventionist and destructive approach to the ecosystem of the Western Ghats HLWG recommended a prohibitory and regulatory regime. It states that, "All other infrastructure development activities, necessary for the region, will be carefully scrutinized and assessed for cumulative impact and development needs, before clearance."[17] The report clearly prohibits new townships, area development projects and any construction project of 20,000m2 and above would not be allowed. It gives

[15] An Analysis of the HLWG, Kerala Sate Biodiversity Board, www.Keralabiodiversity.org, viewed on 14/12/2015

[16] http://tvmtalkies.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Kasturirangan-Report-HLWG.pdf, viewed on 14/12/2015

[17] http://tvmtalkies.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Kasturirangan-Report-HLWG Page xiii of report vol 1 and 16/175 of PDF viewed on 14/12/2015

rights to local communities through Grama Sabha, a democratic body of the local governing body of the people, to make decisions on all future projects. Environmental clearance is to be considered for decisions to be taken on all development projects, located within 10km of the Western Ghats Environmental Sensitive area.[18] The HLWG report also emphasises that, "The villages within the Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA) will be involved in decision making on all future projects. All projects must have prior-informed consent with no objection certificate from the Gram Sabha of the village. It also stipulates that the provision for prior informed consent should be issued in line with the Forest Rights Act.

A major criticism of this report is that "economic exploitation of the resources of the Western Ghats has received maximum consideration while conservation and sustainable development have been totally side-lined and neglected, notwithstanding the various pretentious statements on conservation or sweet-coated words on conservation."[19] Madhav Gadgil painfully responds to the Kasthurirangan's Report by saying,

> It would appear that we are now more British than the British and are asserting that a nature friendly approach in the cultural landscape is merely a contrivance to prevent the rich and powerful of the country and of the globalized world from taking over all lands and waters to exploit and pollute as they wish while pursuing lawless, jobless economic growth. It is astonishing that your report strongly endorses such an approach.[20]

It is clear that the Kasthurirangan Report cannot suggest proper guidelines to the government as well as to the victims of the environmental crisis as it is prepared in line with the vested interests of the political powers and the rich land occupants in those areas. However, the CSI church members are ecologically and theologically very clear as they disentangle the ambiguities connected with the recommendations of the Kasturirangan Commission Report. This disentangling process is assisted greatly by their ecological consciousness and their sacred tradition. Their environmental voice "from below" germinates from their sacred tradition.

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[18] http://tvmtalkies.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Kasturirangan-Report-HLWG 150-151/175 of PDF; pages 124-125 viewed on 14/12/2015

[19] http://oeol.blogspot.co.uk/2013/07/critical-evaluation-of-kasturirangan.html viewed on 16/12/2015

[20] An open letter to Kasthurirangan - https://sandrp.wordpress.com/2013/05/18/prof-madhav-gadgil-writes-to-dr-kasturirangan/, viewed on 14/12/2015

6.3.2. Environmentalism 'from Below' Begins with Sacred Tradition

The Protestant Christians, who are economically poor in the Western Ghats region of the Diocesan area, are more concerned about their religious thinking, maintaining that human and all other living and non-living beings have equal rights for their existence and values. Their faith centred environmental thinking is concerned with the poor and the wounded environment. The ecological mission of the church has contributed considerably in making church goers aware of the need to care for the environment. I interviewed Saji Thadathil who is a political leader and an active proponent of environmental concerns. He is in the forefront in leading religious and secular people to respond to the Kasturirangan Commission Report. He was thankful for the ecological teachings of the church, and acknowledged them,

> In my political engagement I approach environmental issues as serious matters. During my youth, I got many opportunities to attend seminars and conferences on ecology. A regular topic of discussion during this time was 'good news to all creation', which was a relevant topic. Based on thematic discussion we upheld in our seminars that we should consider all creatures as God's creations. And hence, people in this area favour the understanding that environmental protection should encompass all human beings and all other living and non-living beings on the earth.[21]

The church stands for the poor and the options for the poor have become its missional teaching. Christian views on the liberation of the poor have been at the centre of the activist dimension of the church and it has striven to offer a better life to the marginalised sections within the church and society at large. When the church saw the exploitation of nature by the rich it saw the wounded nature as a wounded member of their broken life system. Shibi Stephen explained how his community understands this issue.

> Even when discussions on the Kasturirangan Commission Report were on its way, rock mining was taking place at Vellara near Melukavu. Big rocks in the mountains are part of the survival of nature. Tourism is rampant due to the natural beauty of the mountains in this area. However, once property owners understood the social and political position of the Idukki (people who are living in this area are socially and economically weak, and politically unorganised), they started to grab the land of people who had only 5 or 10cents of land. After taking all these pieces of land rich people are planning to construct a dam for water to use on their cultivated land and also to use to promote their tourism businesses. When I went to my home for a vacation, I had discussions not only with the villagers but also with the church. They said that

[21] Saji Thadathil, interviewed on 22/07/2015

> we should respond to this exploitive action. We have to save our environment as we save our life from political and social exploitations.[22]

The understanding of the environment as a fellow being has emerged as faith expression, and this sacred approach compels them to care for the earth. As their life is in danger their environment is also in danger. Therefore, for the poor the profound way of addressing the contemporary environmental crisis is to view human beings and the natural world form as a single community. The story of the EKD church members' points to the fact that the poor and all the vulnerable living and non-living beings are making environmental voice 'from below.'

6.3.3. Environmentalism 'from Below' is a Resistance Against Injustice

The poor who live in the abovementioned area realise that they are forced to move out of their habitat by the rich. The right of the poor to live is being questioned. They are afraid of local environmental issues and suspicious about discussions taking place which may result in displacement from their living habitat. Therefore these communities are seeking justice. Their voice is similar to the situation of the poor as explained by Northcott that, "they (environmental victims) have no voice in the science-informed deliberations of modern parliaments and corporate boardrooms, though their fates are determined by such deliberation."[23] Now the church members of the EKD have become aware of what is happening and that their area is completely immersed with environmental injustices. They now realise that the mission of the church must include environmental justice concerns.

In envisioning environmental sustainable living habitats, the voice of the victims and the eviction of their living habitat are the determinant factors in explaining religious environmentalism. Such contexts reveal the environmental consciousness of victims, and their interrelatedness with earth. In connection with the Kasthurirangan Report (KR), Saji Thadathil said that poor communities are afraid of its implementation. He said that,

> People who live in this area are mainly poor, and have little property, around 5 cents or 10 cents, but at the same time rich people who live in this area have more land. When people who live in this area are asked to vacate their land, it will badly affect the poor as they are not able to buy new property because they have very little money. Therefore once this report is executed, the poor

[22] Shibi Stephen, interviewed on 22/07/2015
[23] Michael S. Northcott, *A Moral Climate the ethics of global warming*, 6

> will have no future. We strongly argue for the poor and their survival even though we are highly committed to caring for nature.[24]

The growing concern regarding the environment is well affirmed and explained by linking the issue with the survival of the poor and their commitment to the conservation of nature.

The CSI Christian community upholds environmental justice principles based on the relationship between the diversity of their local environment and social values in relation to their marginalized status of life. Cecily's response to the social and environmental issues in their local environment reveals the strong interconnection between their mindfulness to biodiversity and their sustainable life. She said that,

> For us keeping biodiversity is an issue of justice. And keeping biodiversity and sustain ecosystem of our living place is the responsibility of the communities who live in these areas. We understand that destruction of the local ecosystem is a violation of rights. Therefore through our protests we claim that there should be a sustainable balance between people's life in this ecological sensitive area and the environment.[25]

The principle of justice is highlighted in the voice of ecological sensitivity. In the response to KR the CSI church members maintained that displacement, development projects of other agencies and the subsequent migration of rich people to the mountain ranges will affect the ecosystem of the land severely. They wanted to explain this issue as an issue of justice.

K. C. Abraham, a leading Indian ecological liberation theologian, affirms that the environmental problem is ultimately an issue of justice.[26] The experiences of the struggle of the marginalized reveal several dimensions of eco-justice in connection with economic exploitation and environmental degradation. In such situations it is the poor who respect and care for nature, who are displaced from their habitat.

6.3.4. Displacement of the Poor is Anti-ecological

The CSI church members are strong enough to mount local environmental resistance as they strive for justice in matters which fundamentally affect them. They carefully consider their present reality fearing that new development trends, combined with the effects of the Kasthurirangan Commission Report will undermine their relationship and religious understanding of nature. Foreseeing eviction from

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[24] Saji Thadathil, interviewed on 22/07/2015
[25] Cecily, interviewed on 22/07/2015
[26] K. C. Abraham, *Liberative Solidarity: Contemporary Perspective on Mission*, (Thiruvalla, CSS, 1996).

their land, CSI church members challenge the issue of natural biodiversity. The CSI church members who participate in the protest foresee their displacement, and remember the stories of displacement which had taken away their fertile lands in the past. Shibi Stephen spoke of how poor communities had lived on fertile lands and possessed an ecological and agricultural consciousness. He seemed very emotional when he explained how they lost their land. He said,

> I was told during my childhood that, my ancestors lived in those fertile lands and were practising cultivation for their daily sustenance. But people from other places came and bought the land. They caused much trouble for our ancestors and sent them to the hill slopes. Therefore members of my communities are still poor and face different forms of struggles including environmental issues. The Kasthurirangan report, which was prepared with the help of aerial views, excludes areas where the rich have already developed big tourist projects, while the hill slopes, where poor communities live, are marked as Ecologically Sensitive Areas. Because of this, poor farmer are not able to cultivate on their own land, and struggle to meet their daily sustenance needs and struggle to preserve the diversity of the land as they and their ancestors had done in the past. Also they are not able to fund their children's education because they are unable to get money from a loan or a bank for this purpose. Consequently, educational standards in this area are very poor. Land lords are looking for those people who hold a small portion of land, and unlawfully they own small farmers' land to make more profit, and make the poor poorer.[27]

These poor farming communities now realise that they have become the object of exploitative discourse, both of the nation and the rich, who are acting as agents of environmental protection in designating the location as an ecological sensitive area and evicting poor farming communities in the name of preservation of environmental biodiversity. The Protestant communities are the descendants of agricultural communities who followed the logic of diversity in their approach to agriculture and the preservation of the local environment. Through their traditional methods of agricultural practice they maintain their lives, and thus they try to keep ecosystem and biodiversity of their lands. Shiva claims that stable communities live in harmony with their ecosystems and protect them always.[28] Kevin J. O'Brien reminds us of the relationship between the need to preserve biodiversity and the care of marginalised and exploited communities. According to him, human beings must concern themselves with their social and economic values since the degradation of

[27] Shibi Stephen, interviewed on 22/07/2015.
[28] Vandana Shiva, *Monocultures of the Mind: Perspectives on Biodiversity and Biotechnology* (London: Zed Books, 1993), 73.

biodiversity largely impacts on those who are marginalised and have few resources.[29]Rob Nixon defines environmentalism of the poor as a voice of the living condition of people and their environmental locations that emerges from the responses experienced when they are dispossessed of their lands, and are left to a gradual level of slow violence,[30] and such experience define the subalternity of the environmental victims.

6.3.5. Environmentalism 'From Below': A Subaltern Voice for Sustainability

Environmental injustice is a marginalising system in which a group of people are faced with both social and environmental subordination. The environmental victims or the poor of the inequitable distribution of ecological resources bear the image of subalternity. This is because the struggle for a healthy living habitat and the fight against environmental and social injustice are the subjects of the subaltern voice.

The ecological root of the subaltern voice is the brokenness of the environmental victims and their consciousness toward environmental conservation and sustainable living. Cecily expressed her environmental commitment in terms of justice and her concerns regarding a sustainable relationship based on environmental conservation. Cecily said that,

> Poor people need their own land. For that we need to give land to them, and provide a situation for them to cultivate these lands. They should cultivate according to the needs of their daily sustenance. Since they do not have such opportunities now, they buy things from the markets, which are brought in from distant places. But at the same time if we cultivate in our own lands we will remain active in caring for our environment. Otherwise, we have to work in the factories, buying things from the market and then we will not take care of our environment. Poor people are to be given the opportunities to get land for cultivation to be vigil in protecting their environment.[31]

Cecily's words give a new sense of human needs which could foster a healthful life and inspire human communities to express their ecological responsibilities. The land of Kerala is known to maintain home gardens, a house with fenced or without fenced croft. For Christians a croft is a place for cultivation and is a symbol of the protection of the environment.

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[29] Kevin J. O'brien, *An Ethics of Biodiversity: Christianity, Ecology, and the Variety of Life* (Washington DC: George Town University Press, 2010), 174

[30] Rob Nixon, 2011. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 7.

[31] Cecily, interviewed on 22/07/2015

P. G. George, an organic farmer and a member of the EKD is an example of someone making his home garden a sign of the protection of the environment and a sacred place for cultivation. The protest of the CSI communities is for a clean environment that could offer a quality life to all living and non-living beings. The quality of the environment is understood as an expression of environmental sustainability. The concept of the quality of the environment can be appreciated from Amartya Sen's idea of environment and sustainability. Sen clearly believes that the environment offers opportunities to people but maintains that the impact of the environment on human lives must be among the principal considerations in assessing the value of the environment. Based on the concept of the value and quality of the environment he wants to see environmental sustainability in connection with preservation and enhancement of the quality of human life.[32] The CSI church members focus on sustainable living by seriously looking at preservation and enrichment of the environment as a missional agenda.

6.4. Environment and People First: A Question Toward Sustainability

The reports of the 'World Commission on Environment and Development'[33] and UNEP's Geo'[34] claim that poverty is a major cause of environmental degradation. There is a strong argument among environmental thinkers that the rural poor in developing countries are heavily dependent on the resources of nature for their sustenance.[35] Taking into consideration the rural life settings of India, Jodha remarks that the poor depend heavily on open access resources such as forests, pastures, and water resources which leads to over consumption.[36] Similarly Reardon

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[32] Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 248.

[33] World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future, (Oxford University Press, 1987).

[34]Robin Clarke, (ed) *Global Environment Outlook 2000*, (London: Earthscan Publications,1999).

[35] N.S. Jodha, 'Common Property Resources and the Dynamics of Rural Poverty: Field Evidence from Dry Regions of India, in William F. Hyde and Gregory S. Amacher (eds) *Economics of Forestry and Rural development – An Empirical Introduction from Asia*, 2000, (eds.), (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2000), William Cavendish, 'Empirical Regularities in the Poverty-Environment Relationship of African Rural Households' *World Development*, 28, 11, 2000, v. 28, 1979-2003; M. P.Shiva and S.K. Verma, *Approaches to Sustainable Forest Management and Biodiversity Conservation with Pivotal Role of Non Timber Forest Products* (Dehradun: Valley Offset Printers and Publishers, 2002). Urvashi Narain, Shreekant Gupta & Klaas Van't Veld, "Poverty and the Environment: Exploring the Relationship between Household Incomes, Private Assets and Natural Assets" Working Paper no. 134, Centre For Development Economics (Delhi: Centre For Development Economics, 2005).

[36] N.S. Jodha, 'Common Property Resources and the Dynamics of Rural Poverty: Field Evidence from Dry Regions of India, in William F. Hyde and Gregory S. Amacher (eds) *Economics of Forestry and Rural*

and Vosti point out that the lack of sufficient investment for maintaining soil quality breaks the fertility of the soil system.[37] However, contrary to this, Mary Tiffen, Michael Mortimore and Francis Gichuki claim that traditional communities have managed the resources prudently despite their poverty.[38] As far as the life and environmental understanding of the Mala Araya CSI Communities are concerned, the poor and their prudent resource use is well manifested, but on the other hand, among CSI communities there are still ambiguities regarding Christian faith and environmental conservationism. Such ambiguities prevail in some Christians in the Diocese of the Kollam Kottarakara Diocese. Jodha, Rao, Narai, Gupta & Veld have undertaken extensive studies in India by analysing common property and open access to the resources of nature in rural settings.[39] These studies explicitly delineate the links between poverty and the environment.

I would like to consider the above claims concerning the link between poverty and environment for an empirical investigation in connection with the life realities of the members of the CSI Mangalapuram Church in Kollam Kottarakkara Diocese. During my field work I visited this church and met two youths of the Mangalapuram church who were working at English Indian Clays Limited. This investigation deals with the issue of life sustenance of the poor Christians and their silent voice against the exploitation of the resources of nature responsible for their situation of poverty.

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development – An Empirical Introduction from Asia, 2000, (eds.), (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2000)

[37] Thomas Reardon and Stephen A. Vosti, 'Links between Rural Poverty and Environment in developing countries: Asset Categories and Investment Poverty' *World Development*, 23, 1995, 1495-1506.

[38] Mary Tiffen, Michael Mortimore and Francis Gichuki, More People, Less Erosion: Environmental Recovery in Kenya. (New York: J. Wiley, 1994).

[39] N.S. Jodha, 'Common Property Resources and the Dynamics of Rural Poverty: Field Evidence from Dry Regions of India, in William F. Hyde and Gregory S. Amacher (eds) *Economics of Forestry and Rural development – An Empirical Introduction from Asia*, 2000, (eds.), (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2000); C. H. Hanumantha Rao, *Agricultural Growth, Rural Poverty and Environmental Degradation in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press,1994); Urvashi Narain, Shreekant Gupta & Klaas Van't Veld, "Poverty and the Environment: Exploring the Relationship between Household Incomes, Private Assets and Natural Assets" Working Paper no. 134, Centre For Development Economics (Delhi: Centre For Development Economics, 2005).

6.4.1 Understanding People First Approach to Environment: A Brief Examination on People First Approach with Reference to English India Clays Limited, Thiruvananthapuram

The English Indian Clays Limited was established in 1966 by the Maharaja of Travancore along with Mr. M. N. Ramakrishna Iyer in Trivandrum.[40] Prior to its success the company commissioned a 20000TPA Calciner plant at Thonnakkal, near Mangalapuram. This mining project was warmly welcomed by the communities of the Mangalapuram Panchayat with the expectation that the project would offer employment opportunities, improve living standards and increase land values. Today however, the reality is that about 60 percent of the landscape has been brought under the ownership of the mining companies. Mangalapuram is situated 20 miles from Thiruvananthapuram, the capital city of Kerala. Thiruvananthapuram Techno Park is adjacent to this mining area and around 37.000 people reside in the Mangalapuram Panchayat. The clay from this particular region is considered to be some of the finest in the world. Due to uncontrolled clay mining in this area, the landscape has been badly damaged as deep trenches have appeared. These deep channels have claimed 15 lives thus making local residents fearful of the area. The company's activities have also led to drastic decline in water availability and as a result wells and water bodies have dried up. Dust particles from the mining sites and factory effluent have polluted drinking water sources and most of the residents are suffering from asthmatic and skin disease. In 1997, 125 hectares of land was under paddy cultivation, but by 2004 the cultivable land had declined to 75 hectares. The current water shortage does not allow for paddy cultivation and mining companies continue to purchase paddy fields by exploiting the vulnerable position of the farmers in those areas.[41] Recently the mining company began supplying water in order to silence the people who were protesting against their activities. People were concerned about their local environment and sought the help of The Human Rights Commission in their quest to stop the mining.

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[40] https://www.scribd.com/doc/98077875/ORGANISATION-STUDY-AT-ENGLISH-INDIAN-CLAYS-LTD, viewed on 16/07/2016

[41] http://thegreateditor.blogspot.co.uk/2006/10/mining-in-mangalapuram.html, viewed on 03/10/2015

The people of Mangalapuram are mainly facing environmental issues relating to clay mining projects. The process involves collecting the clay, crushing it and transporting it in large vehicles to different companies situated in the area for process. During the processing of the clay, smoke and other pollutants are released into the atmosphere. It is this issue which arouses the most fury in the people of Mangalapuram who maintain that the company's activities and processes represent a major health hazard to them in the form of cancer and respiratory disease. In addition the water table has notably lowered and as a result all wells in the area have dried up. Therefore, the issue of drinking water is a major problem for local people.

Some members of the CSI Mangalapuram work for the English Indian Clays Limited Company and during my visit to the area I had little response from these members of the church. They know that what the company is doing is illegal and that their processes would affect the life and health of the inhabitants in Mangalapuram. However, these members of the church were silent because they fear for their jobs and income. Sajan, a former District Secretary of the Christian Endeavour Youth Fellowship (CEYF) said,

> Now the position is that we cannot be for or against the clay mining issue. We cannot respond. We cannot have an opinion about the project. Many of our church members are working in the mining section and also some are working in the constructing factory buildings. If we oppose the clay mining then many of our church members who work there will lose their job and their daily sustenance will be affected. So we are going along with the situation.[42]

The members of this local congregation are economically poor and socially they are marginalized communities. There are two kinds of response from within this congregation, both having strong opinions about their local environmental issues. Sunil Raj explained the responses and the involvement of the church in the environmental agitation movement. He said that, "In my church there are two types of response from members. One group is in favour of the mining works and the other is demanding its closure. At least one member of each family will be working in mining so such families will not take part in any agitation movement because they are reliant on their wages from the company. If the company is closed, their regular income will be stopped therefore the members who participate in the agitation movement are very few."[43] Joining in with the extraction of the resources of nature is their only way of maintaining their daily life.

India is a mineral-rich country, having a geographical potential of over 20,000 known mineral deposits. Indian mineral holding areas are unfortunately located in either green forests or river systems. Regarding the land where the mineral holdings are found, the State of India's Environment Report affirms that "These lands are largely inhabited by India's poorest and most marginalized people – the scheduled tribes and scheduled castes – who depend on the very same forests and watersheds for their survival."[44]

I understand the reasons why the Christian community working in the mining company put their daily sustenance first. Even though they know through church sermons the magnitude of the environmental crises and Christian views regarding it, they are economically and socially weak and feel that in order to survive, they have no other choice but to join in with the mining work. Sajan revealed a guilty conscience when he said, "What the members of the church who are presently working at the English India Clays Limited do is totally wrong, but on the other hand

[42] Sajan, interviewed on 23/07/2015
[43] Sunil Raj, interviewed on 23/07/2015
[44] State of India's Environment, Ministry of Environment & Forests Government of India, 2009, 3

its part of their livelihood too. So, we are not able to make a clear decision."[45] Now the Christian workers engaged in mining works face the dilemma that if the mining company is closed down they will lose their jobs and livelihood, but if the mining company is not closed down they will lose their local environment. For the group of people who work in the company, this mining project is a symbol of blessing.

6.4.2. Unprotected Land and Unprotected People Are the Signs of Environmental Crisis

The people that populate this area are poor and middle-class communities and poor Dalit communities. Among this mixed group the Dalit community are mainly Christians. Generally, most of the inhabitants are poor and do not have a political voice or power to influence the situation. When political leaders come to support the protest movement, in the guise of negotiation, nothing ever changes due to their manipulation.

I believe that movements, like the Action Council, which even though trying to change things are being taken advantage of by the politicians. Sunil Raj revealed the duplicitous role adopted by political leaders during agitation programmes. He explained, "Some political members do come to support strikes but after talking to the management they change their ideas and try to take advantage of the situation and the people. So the issues are left unresolved."[46] Political leaders are constantly speaking on behalf of the movement and acting as agents of the company. "The political parties tell us that they will solve the problems by talking to the management and they take money from us but on the other hand they join with the management and corrupt the whole situation. There have been many instances like these."[47] The local inhabitants are powerless in raising their voice against this strong company which has robust political influence and uses it to exploit poor communities and continues to extract the minerals. Hence the poor who work in the mining company are in dilemma in saving their life and environment. Sajan revealed his understanding of the environment by saying, "God is the one who made creation for our use. So in this way I see that in the matter of clay usage it has been designed by

[45] Sajan, interviewed on 23/07/2015
[46] Sunil Raj, interviewed on 23/07/2015
[47] Sunil Raj, interviewed on 23/07/2015

God for our use and so I see it as a blessing from God."[48] It is clear that Sajan understands the consequences of what they are doing with the recourse of nature but he is not able to address this issue because his community finds that their poverty is the bigger issue.

Referring to Indian high profile mega development projects and the environmental protest against such projects, Sunita Narain defines the image of the environmentalism of the poor when she says,

> Take the issue of projects that have been cancelled or held up because of environmental reasons. It would not be wrong to say that virtually all infrastructure and industrial projects – from mining to thermal and hydel and nuclear power to cement or steel – are under attack today from local communities who fear loss of livelihoods. These communities today are at the forefront of India's environmental movement. They are its warriors. But for them environment is not a matter of luxury – fixing the problems of growth, but of survival – fixing growth itself. They know that when the land is mined and trees are cut, their water source dries up or they lose grazing and agricultural fields. They know they are poor. But they are saying, loudly and as clearly as they can, what we call development will only make them poorer. This is what I have called the environmentalism of the poor…[49]

The State of India's Environment Report involved extensive study on how the mining industry utilizes poor communities and land resources for their industrial development. "Mining in India, therefore, is not the simple 'dig and sell' proposition as it is made out to be by the industry. It is, in fact, a highly complex socio-economic and environmental challenge: at stake are natural resources as well as people – forests, wildlife, water, environmental quality and livelihoods."[50] The mining company in Mangalapuram plays the role of a parent in the lives of the poor thus silencing their voices and dividing communities.

6.4.3. Environmental Sustainability as Giving Freedom to the Poor

Environmental ideologies are instilled into the members of the CSI Mangalapuram who are employees of the mining company by the church through sermons, songs and some seminars. Their faith background gives them the awareness from the Bible that they should protect nature and act against any exploiting powers. Sunil Raj is deeply committed to take bold steps for the

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[48] Sajan, interviewed on 23/07/2015

[49] http://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/sunita-narain-how-to-be-or-not-to-be-year-of-environment-111011000048_1.html, viewed on 07/11/2015.

[50] State of India's Environment, Ministry of Environment & Forests Government of India, 2009, 3

preservation of nature from his religious experience. He said, “We should not destroy anything which was created by our creator God. It is true that in the Bible when man was created together with all creation in the Eden garden, he was given the responsibility to take care of it. God never asked man to destroy it. My firm conviction is that we should preserve nature according to the word of God. But when we look at the world we see the tremendous growth of industries which challenges the message of Christianity. Christianity is losing in the context of industrial growth. From my Christian belief I would say we are given direction to preserve nature.”[51] This faith reflection is contrary to other expressions of giving moral strength to use the resources of nature only for human beings. This contradiction between their faith and action is due to their struggle for their economic survival and the realisation that their freedom to choose a sustainable living environment is being denied by the rich and the political powers of the nation.

In Mangalapuram, the mining company’s activities, including their exploitation of the resources, have indeed become a threat to the freedom of the poor. Foreseeing an impending impoverished life, the members of the CSI Mangalapuram church who work in the mining company, are convinced that the company’s future in this area is limited because of land availability and the vulnerability of their geographical location. Narain comments about other situations in India where the poor have been entrapped by development projects in the present period of growth. She states that,

> The fact is today development projects take local resources — minerals, water or land — but cannot provide employment to replace the livelihoods of all those who they displace. It is for this reason that the country is resonating with cries of people who are fighting development itself.[52]

Therefore development, by extracting the resources of nature is not at all a blessing, but a curse, as this mode of development leads poor communities to a more impoverished state of life. Richard M. Auty; and Jeffrey D. Sacha & Andrew M. Warner describe the wealth of nature as a curse.[53] A curse which appears as an obstacle to use the freedom of the poor.

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[51] Sunil Raj, interviewed on 23/07/2015

[52] http://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/sunita-narain-how-to-be-or-not-to-be-year-of-environment-111011000048_1.html, viewed on 11/01/2016.

[53] Richard M. Auty, *Sustaining Development in Mineral Economics: The Resource Curse Thesis* (London: Routledge, 1993).; Jeffrey D. Sachs Andrew M. Warner, *Natural Resource Abundance and Economic Growth,*

Anil Agarwal, a prominent Indian environmentalist redefined environmental problems through the eyes of the poor people. He was the first Indian critic to challenge 'generalisation tendencies'[54] in the understanding of environmental issues. For him the environmental politics, the choice and the risks faced by the poor are the subject matters in defining environmental problems.[55]He pays special attention to land degradation and desertification, and the environmental rights and needs of the poor throughout his environmental discussions. He believes that without the representation of poor people, attempts to explain and define issues related to environment and development are in vain. According to Agarwal every ecological niche is occupied by some occupational or cultural group for their own benefit, and if that ecological niche is destroyed or used for other purposes by the government or powerful in the society, then the less powerful or dispossessed people will suffer. Therefore he links increased inequality and the growth of environmental problems.[56]

The poor become the victims of the environmental problems where the resources of nature are exploited by the rich. Environmental victims are the neglected groups in the economic development of the nation. There is strong opposition to the current pattern of development which sets aside the social and economic life of the communities who want to lead a sustainable life. Jean Dreze & Amartya Sen argue that the present mode of development enriches the quality of the environment and provides a better life of the poor. They argue that if development is about enhancing human freedoms and the quality of life, then the quality of the environment is bound to be part of what we want to preserve and promote. They suggest that this broader view of development enables the country not only to integrate development and environmental concerns but also to achieve a better understanding of our environmental challenges, in terms of the quality and freedom of human lives – today and in the future. Their argument on development based freedom becomes more relevant to the improvement of the living conditions of the

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National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 5398 (Cambridge, Massachusetts Avenue: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1995). http://www.nber.org/papers/w5398.pdf, viewed on 09/01/2016.

[54] During1960s and 1970s there was an understanding globally emerged that the environmental problems emerge due to the pollution growth and deforestation, and the poor people were blamed in deforestation issues.

[55] Tim Forsyth, 'Anil Agarwal (1947-2002)' in David Simon (ed) *Fifty Key Thinkers on Development* (London, Routledge, 2006).9.

[56] Anil Agarwal, Ravi Chopra and Kalpana Sharma, *The State of India's Environment 1982*, (New Delhi, Centre for Science and Environment, 1982).113

poor and the environment. Therefore they assert that development cannot be divorced from ecological and environmental concerns.[57]

Jean Dreze & Amartya Sen discus the relational role of human freedom and capabilities in regard to sustainable living.[58] The expansion of human freedom and capabilities will generate the resources with which public and private efforts can be systematically mobilized to expand education, health care, nutrition, social facilities, and other essentials of fuller and freer human life for all. Therefore, it could be argued that human freedom is dependent on the integrity of the environment, involving the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the geographical habitat in which we live.

6.5. Conclusion

Environmental activism is connected with the sacred ecological tradition of the faith communities and the voices of the victims of environmental problems. The Christian approach to justice provides a strong foundation to look at environmental problems with praxis-oriented concerns. Environmental justice is reflected as an expression of the affirmation that God's justice is extended to all creations. The CSI church's involvement in the protest against Vilappilsala Waste Decomposing Plant points out that Christian social engagement in wider communities perceives the struggles of the environmental victims and empowers all faith communities to stand for the care for their environment. The church's sacred approach to environment inculcate environmental justice as a missional concern and demand for a healthy environment for all sections of society and all living and non-living beings. A sacred approach to environmental sustainability is a performative commitment to the restoration of creation which consists of; "bringing salvation into present reality: challenging the oppression of the poor and the theft of their lands and livelihood, inspiring compassion for vulnerable persons and vulnerable animals or habitats, and transforming social relations between ritual participants as an anticipations of the

[57] Jean Dreze & Amartya Sen argue with relevant example, both of them argue that, "since we value the freedom to lead a pollution-free life, the preservation of a pollution-free atmosphere must be an important part of the objectives of development. Especially for poorer people, who tend to spend a much higher proportion of their daily lives in the open – sometimes even sleeping on the streets – the quality of air is a critically important influence on the level of deprivation of their lives. Jean Dreze & Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory India and its Contradictions* (London, Penguin Books, 2013), 43.

[58] Jean Dreze & Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory India and its Contradictions* (London, Penguin Books, 2013).

quest for justice and love in society as a whole."[59] Protestant Christians in their geographical locations place the life of the poor at the centre of the environmental crisis and speak for sustainable living. Such Christian environmental movements act with a social commitment based on justice and the increase of the capabilities of the poor and the environment.

The strong advocacy emerging from the protests that care for the poor and the protection of the biodiversity of the environment, are the fundamental principles for building up sustainable living communities. For the Protestant Christians sustainability works against environmental threats by aiming to meet the needs of future generations, sustaining the life support systems of the planet, and the reduction of hunger and poverty.[60] The living condition of the poor and environmental degradation is viewed in connection with the discourse of the environmental victims. Michael Egan opines that, "When a group of people is faced with both social and environmental subordination, they are the victims of environmental injustice."[61] Enabling both faith and secular communities to experience a sustainable living environment is the mission paradigm of the CSI diocese which reveals their utmost commitment to care for nature and environmental victims. A Christian environmentalism, which is emerging 'from below', offers a theological grounding for formulating environmental sustainability. Therefore, in order to formulate a Christian environmental theology, in the following chapter I use CSI liturgies, sermons and publications combined with the major findings from the previous chapters. The next chapter will also explain the metaphor of nature 'as the body of God', and its sacred relationship with the cosmic body of Christ to speak for the wounded nature and to search for a quality environment as a sacred manifestation of environmental sustainability.

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[59] Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, 1996, 322.
[60] *Sustainable Development an Evolving Concept*; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO): Paris, France, 2004. http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/files/30363/11035294683brief_Concept_of_ESD.pdf/brief+Concept+of+ESD.pdf/ , viewed on 20/12/2015.
[61] Michael Egan, 'Subaltern Environmentalism in the United States: A Historiographic Review', *Environment and History*, 8,1 (February 2002), 22.

Chapter 7
Towards A Theology of Environmental Sustainability

7.1. Introduction

The in-depth analysis of the last three chapters show the ecological behaviour associated with the Christian traditions in Kerala and the indigenous ecological landscape of the Kani tribal communities. It is understood clearly that CSI Keralan Christians and the indigenous tribal traditions reveal a productive engagement in environmental management systems. The indigenous ecological behaviour is integrally tied with the environmental management of the Christian communities. The rituals and practices of both traditions reveal the spiritual relationship between human and nature, which presents foundations on which to formulate a relevant theology of environmental sustainability. The tradition rooted in the sacred approach to nature, which is seen in the indigenous communities and the faith communities see nature as the body of God, and from this realisation the relationship between human and nature is bolstered reverently, and the liturgical and sacramental relationship with the Creator God is affirmed through worship and ministry of the faith communities.

Christian worship traditions and environmental concerns are intertwined and could therefore reaffirm the sacredness and the doctrine of creation in order to formulate a relevant theology for environmental sustainability. This chapter attempts to highlight environmental integral theological doctrines based on the general theme: the sacred and sustainability. The doctrines emerging from the subsequent discussion will have dimensions of environmental and social justice – eco-justice, pointing towards the idea of the sacredness of nature and religious environmentalism from below. In the light of the analysis of previous chapters and the deliberations of environmental theological doctrines, I hold the view that we cannot formulate a relevant theology of environmental sustainability if we do not integrate the sacredness of nature with a religious “environmentalism from below.” Freedom to strive for a quality environment is a theological alternative emerging in this chapter, defining quality environment to be a sacred manifestation of environmental sustainability.

In this chapter I have drawn upon ecological writings of South Indian Protestant theologians, and ecological study materials and liturgies used by the Church of South India. I have given considerable emphasis to Macfague and Boff with the realisation that Indian Christian theologians such as K. C. Abraham, George Mathew Nalunnakkal and George Zachariah have referred to them repeatedly when formulating an Eco theology in India. This chapter is mainly concerned with drawing theological metaphors from the religious and cosmic understanding of the CSI dioceses in Kerala, liturgical and sacramental experiences, and the integral dimension of the sustainable relationship between faith communities and nature in maintaining the practice of sustainability.

7.2. Re-imagining Environmental Theology and Understanding Nature as the Body of God

I begin my theological discussion by pointing out the metaphorical view of nature, which is extensively understood and propagated among the members of the CSI congregations in Kerala. Metaphorically, nature is understood as the body of God, which offers a hope for the victims of environmental problems and the poor. It is understood that religious commitment to care for nature and the poor is a major concern of Indian Christian Eco theology. It is also argued that the Christian life, nurtured by worship, rituals and liturgies which sense the immanence of God in nature, will direct Christians to formulate an action centred theology for creating sustainable living communities in communion with God and nature.

The cosmic vision comes to Indian philosophical discussions from the Ramanuja tradition, which was formed just a century before St. Francis of Assisi. Ramanuja saw the world as the body of God and it was this central insight that informed the whole of his Bhakti philosophy.[1] In India seeing creation as the body of God was first propagated by A. J. Appasamy in the 1940s. He articulated Indian Christian theology from Ramanuja's philosophical tradition. According to Appasamy God created the entire universe as his body. In his words God created the world and through the act of creation God revealed his character, and made his nature known

[1] Jyoti Sahi, 'Dance in the Wilderness' in Yeow Choo Lak (ed) *Theology and Cultures: Doing Theology with Asian Resources* (Singapore: ATESEA, 1995), 125.

in creation.[2] Nature as the body of God has been articulated as a theological metaphor in the history of Indian theological discourse.

God's creation is understood as God's revelation in nature. The image of God and the attributes of God are present in creation. This doctrinal idea is well expressed in the words of the members of the church. Based on his extensive ecological interactions with members of the local parishes, Jyoti Isaac shared the views of the parishioners, by pointing out that God is the creator of the universe, and God's presence in creation invites a human response as God does with creation. He said that,

> God revealing himself in creation is the real vision we need to understand. If we read Psalm 148, it reveals how creations pray to God for the created beings. The relationship between God and creation is almost the same as God's relationship to human beings. And creation is sacred, and it is the body of God. All living and non-living entities are parts of God's body fulfilling different responsibilities.[3]

This theological metaphor describes the relationship between God and the created universe, and the image of God in creation reveals the sacredness of the earth. P. G. George expressed his ecological understanding in connection with the metaphor that nature is the body of God. He said that, "the ecological lessons I learned from religious experience is that God created the universe and through which God revealed himself on all living and non-living beings on earth, and the Creator God dwells on it."[4] The indigenous communities also hold the metaphorical view that they are part of the sacred earth and all other objects seen on the earth are different parts of the body of their spirituality.[5] In the words of Bergant, metaphors are poetic devices which convey the insights into what reality is and, at the same time, what it is not. She considers metaphors are useful in making sense of ecological sensitivity. She gives an example of a metaphor which can draw human attention to know the relationship of God and the creation order. She maintains that "the metaphor of the world as the body of God recaptures the sense of the earth's sacredness. It reminds us that like all bodies, the earth is the medium of communication. It is through this

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[2] A. J. Appasamy, *The Gospel and India's Heritage* (1942),206.
[3] Jyoti Isaac, interviewed on 22/08/2015.
[4] P. G. George, interviewed on 22/07/2015.
[5] M. C. Thomas, *Dhaivanubhavathinte Bahuswarangal: Plural Voices of God Experiences* (Kottayam: CSS, 2009), 76-77.

'body' that God speaks to us, reveals something of God's creativity to us."[6] Sallie McFague refers to the universe as the body of God, through which the range of God's inclusive love is guided for all of creation and especially for the oppressed and the needy creatures.[7] This metaphor reveals God's radicality of love for the vulnerable and the oppressed, and identifies with all the suffering bodies.[8] The Christian response to the environmental crisis begins with the realisation that God the creator of the universe is manifested in creation, and though invisible dwells in creation. The theological and ecological responses of faith communities begin with the understanding that nature is the body of God.

7.2.1. Nature as the Body of God: A Healing Metaphor

The realisation that 'nature as the body of God' has become an ecological catechetical praxis centred lesson in the life and ministry of faith communities. This metaphorical discussion invites faith communities to learn ecological lessons in order to heal the brokenness of God's creation. In the words of Paulachan Kochappilly, "God is the creator, the saviour, and the sanctifier. This is a blessing and a challenge to human beings, for they share in the creative, saving and sanctifying power of God. Since they share in the image of God, human beings have to make the presence of God visible, tangible, and credible in the universe."[9] Educational institutions have also used this approach as a means to express human commitment to care for nature. The Principal of the Malabar Christian College expressed her views that, "Respect for life, when you respect life that is nature. Respect life, respect God you see God in each person, even in small tiny flower, you see the glory of God, so that is reverence, and our students, you know, they bring it out often. It is same, evident in the nature."[10] She conveys this approach to her students to nurture their interest in healing the brokenness of nature.

Retnakar Sadananda, the General Secretary of the Church of South India formulates a powerful ecological metaphor regarding the concept of soil, from which I argue that nature is sacred and all living and non-living beings carry a relational character inextricably linked with human beings. In the words of Sadananda,

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[6] Dianne Bergant, *The Earth Is The Lord's: The Bible, Ecology, and Worship* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998). 42.
[7] Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1993), 161.
[8] Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1993), 162.
[9] Paulachan Kochappilly, 'Ecological Crisis and Christian Response' *Theology for our Times*, 18 (2016), 7.
[10] Mary Gladys Pavamani, interviewed on 17/08/2015.

> The Bible narrates and reminds humans that we are created from the soil. It is a way of describing how intrinsically human life is intertwined with the earth. Generally unrecognized and taken for granted, soil is essential to the well-being of life on Earth. Soil traps and recharges rainwater for drinking purposes; it provides a habitat for numerous plants and animals; it recycles decaying organic matter which in turn becomes a source of new energy; and soil functions as a giant carbon sink for trapping dangerous carbon dioxide emissions that would otherwise escape into the atmosphere. Unheralded and neglected, the earth's soil is worthy of our respect, even our adoration and reverence, because it is foundational to the life-sustaining ecosystems we rely on for our sustenance.[11]

For him, soil is a metaphor from God's creation, which increasingly acts as an ecological agent of healing life system on earth.[12] On the environmental Sunday in 2016 all CSI parishes heard from the pulpit that,

> Our planet earth is the body of Jesus Christ. All living and non-living entities are connected to each other as different parts of the human body. Each entity in the planet earth has its own value and responsibility as of each part of human body has value and responsibility. Harm to an entity will cause damage to the other entity. Water, air, soil, forests, rivers, mountains, valleys, seas are different parts of the body of nature.[13]

While the universe is described as the body of God, the healing metaphor for salvation is also well explained in line with a practical vision towards the sustainability of the universe. The human commitment to a sustainable way of living is a Christian message which emerges from the image of the cosmic body of God.

7.2.2. Nature as the Body of God: A Panentheistic View of Celebration of Life

The metaphor, creation as the body of God, portrays the image of Panentheism. Boff holds the view that, in Panentheism,

> all is not God, but God is in all and all is in God, by reason of the creation by which God leaves God's mark and assurance of God's permanent presence in the creature (providence). The creature always depends on God and carries God within it. God and world are different. One is not the other. But they are not separated or closed. They are open to one another. They are always intertwined with one another. If they are different, it is so they can communicate and be united by communion and mutual presence.[14]

This panentheistic view manifests the distinction between God and creation, and at the same time maintains the relation between them.

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[11] D. Retnakara Sadananda, Towards Understanding Our Green God, *CSI Life*, 13, 6, (2015), 4.
[12] D. Retnakara Sadananda, Towards Understanding Our Green God, *CSI Life*, 13, 6, (2015), 5.
[13] Mathew Koshy Punnakkadu, *Sustainable Use and Production*, Sermon (Thiruvananthapuram, SKD, 2015), 6.
[14] Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 153.

The CSI faith communities re-imagine creation as a celebration of life. (P. G. George) The act of re-imagination is built by songs, liturgies, sacraments and sermons. K. C. Abraham precisely reveals the re-imagination and asserts that, "God is present in all earthly experience enhancing all our relationship. This is not pantheism. 'To see all in God, and God in all' is described as Pan-en-theism, not pantheism. The latter assumes an identity between God and world."[15] The ritual of tree offering seen in some of the rural churches of CSI reflects a sense of a panentheistic approach to creation. The spiritual commitment to care for nature, which is propagated by the environmental activists of the EKD is also built upon the realisation that the planet earth shares the image of God. Paulachan Kochappilly points out a pragmatic realm of environmentalism based on the image of God manifested in creation. According to him,

> God had a special purpose and significance in creating human beings; their significance consists in the fact that they are created in the image and likeness of God. Being in the image and likeness of God is an invitation to take care of everything in the universe as God would care for it. God is the creator, the saviour, and the sanctifier. This is a blessing and a challenge to human beings, for they share in the creative, saving, and sanctifying power of God. Since they share in the image of God, human beings have to make the presence of God visible, tangible, and credible in the universe. It is an existential necessity. They should accompany and animate everything in creation, as if God were present and active.[16]

For him the event of creation is the revelation of God's life, a celebration of the diversity of life and a manifestation of the unity and the beauty of life.[17] The ecological view of the cosmos manifests God's presence and a panentheistic view is more relevant to the generation of an environmental pragmatic vision regarding care for the earth. For a faith community which sees nature as sacred, the concept of Panentheism offers praxis centred reasons to value nature, and to respect and protect it. Sadananda, the General Secretary of the CSI invites faith communities to see the glory of God revealed in creation by caring for the planet earth. In his words, "Caring for creation, restoring the earth as a garden of beauty blessed by God and tended by God's special caretakers, we, the human community should respect God's

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[15] K. C. Abraham, 'God is Green' in Mathew Koshy Punnakkadu (ed) *God is Green: A Third World Approach* (Chennai: CSI Synod, 2004), 31.
[16] Paulachan Kochappilly, Ecological Crisis and Christian Response, Theology for Our Times, 18 (2016), 3.
[17] Paulachan Kochappilly, Ecological Crisis and Christian Response, 6.

glory revealed in creation."[18] The Christian panentheistic view on nature invites faith communities to care for everything in the universe.

7.2.3. Nature as the Body of God: A Metaphor of Crafting Croft

The concept of sacred place and its relationship with people who live in those particular places makes their dwelling place a sacred habitat. The image of sacred place is highly reflected in the life and faith of the CSI Christians in Kerala, especially in rural areas. I develop this metaphor based on Northcott's discussion. Northcott used the term crofter meaningfully in explaining the way in which the ecological landscape is understood. In his words, "For the indigenous forest dweller or crofter, as for the visiting mountaineer or the jobbing forester, the values they find in the landscape of course reflect their own cultural constructions of the landscape."[19] I understand this image as an appropriate source to be used in thinking of forming a theology of environmental sustainability.

Kerala is particularly known for the keeping and maintenance of home gardens which provide economic and sociocultural benefits to the farmers in the villages. This prevailing intensively managed system not only sustains the rich biodiversity of the garden but also provides an income for the household. The maintenance of livelihood and the high levels of biodiversity are testament to its agro-ecological value and its sacred value. It is understood that Christian communities which maintain home gardens do so with a sacred approach for two reasons. The first is that the home garden is given by God, and the second one is the presence of God there in the land and in all living species. Selvaraj, a member of SKD and a retired government employee talked about the robust relationship between his faith and the maintenance of the home garden. He said that,

> God gives me sufficient health and blessings through my home garden. In my garden there are mango trees, jack trees, coconut trees, banana trees, cashew trees, lemon, medicinal plants, pepper, vegetables and flowering plants and ornamental plants. Every day different birds come to collect food from the garden and different bees collect nectar from the plants. I learned from the church that human beings are entrusted to protect the earth as our home. For me this garden is a small home, and the trees, plants, birds, bees

[18] D. Retnakara Sadananda, Towards Understanding Our Green God, 4.
[19] Michael S. Northcott, *Place, Ecology, and the Sacred: The Moral Geography of the Sustainable Communities* (London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2015, 110.

> and so on are the members of this home. What I am doing is an ecological craft.[20]

Selvaraj developed this view from the teaching received from his church. He regards his croft as a sacred place.

The house and its location represent a croft and is a place where human commitment to care for the environment is reflected. When waste disposal had become an issue the former bishop of the SKD, Bishop J. W. Gladstone asked the congregations to protect their local environment by cleaning their houses and premises and decomposing the waste properly. He promoted this idea through the department of Women's Fellowship (WF). He encouraged congregations to organically grow kitchen gardens and use the slurry from the small waste decomposing unit for vegetable cultivation. Bishop Gladstone said,

> In spite of the availability of technology in making the surroundings clean, waste disposal has become one of the serious problems. You know that technology is available to dispose of waste efficiently but this was not being done. My wife was the president of the Women's Fellowship and was very concerned about the situation. She maintained that every family should have a pit to dispose of waste which after time would become good manure for vegetables if every house had a vegetable garden. It was done effectively.[21]

The Women's Fellowship of SKD gave a praxis centred vision to the members to seeing their own homes symbolically as gardens. Among the congregations the concept of the garden is seen to be the sign of a sustainable living environment and a productive commitment to the preservation of their living habitats.

Seeing the home garden symbolically has rich meaning when it is considered as a croft of the creator God. Joseph Mathew points out a croft of the creator God, the earth, which consists of the inhabitants and the inhabited environment – the land, the flora and the fauna, the air, water, space, living and non-living entities and all the forces that sustain life.[22] In a wider theological perspective, a theological reference to the Garden of Eden could be meaningful when this reference is understood in the ecological consciousness of the parishioners. According to Prakash K. George,

> The Garden of Eden is an oikos – a house, in which different organisms coexist in a state of harmony, fulfilling God's purpose. God is present with his creation in an anthropomorphic way. He has given human beings the task of tilling and tending the garden which means to serve and to guard the garden

[20] Selvaraj, interviewed in 21/07/2015
[21] J. W. Gladstone, interviewed on 27/07/2015
[22] Joseph Mathew, 'The Church as the Covenant Community' in Mathew Koshy Punnakadu (ed) *God is Green* (Chennai: CSI,), 62.

> as God's garden. Human beings are given the responsibility to serve and keep the garden so that the whole creation grows to its fullness.[23]

The image of God in creation is being presented in the church as a gardener. God is a gardener who takes care of the garden, and who maintains a croft to sustain a cosmic and spiritual relationship. God's image as a good gardener is the image with which every human being is endowed and is supposed to express in one's life and activities.[24] The image of human beings resembling the image of God has to be of one who takes the utmost care of each and every thing in the garden to ensure a faithful, joyful, beautiful, and fruitful season.

7.3. From "Othered Body" to Christo-cosmic Body

Seeing nature as the body of Christ was a major theological discussion among early Indian Christian theologians. The manifestation of the logos in creation was a key theme of A. J. Appasamy in explaining Indian Christology. According to him Jesus Christ is the logos, present in the whole world, and is also the agent of creation.[25] He uses the term *Antaryamin*, which depicts the presence of logos in the created order.[26] The centre of his theology of creation was that God made the entire universe as his body. In his words, "As a spirit God has no form…So He creates the world in order that through it His character may be revealed. The world of physical objects is the instrument by which He makes known His nature and evokes the worship and love of his devotes."[27] Appasamy's discussion about Antaryamin reveals the Christic presence in the cosmic body.

Chenchiah finds Jesus in the perspective of cosmic process. He opines that Indian Christian theology should discover the Pauline theology of incarnation as the new Adam. According to him,

> Jesus is the first fruits of a new creation," holds St. Paul. "Jesus is the first of a new race, the sons of God," propounds St. John. The flash of illumination places Jesus in creation as its pinnacle and crown and demands from us a study of him in the context of creation along with its major terms, atom,

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[23] Prakash K. George, 'Sacramental Model of Life' in Mathew Koshy Punnakkadu (ed) *Earth Sermons – 3* (Chennai: CSI, ISPCK, 2016), 142.
[24] Paulachan Kochappilly, 'Ecological Crisis and Christian Response' *Theology for our Times*, 18 (2016), 8.
[25] A. J. Appasamy, *What is Moksha? A Study in the Johannine Doctrine of Love* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1931), 166-167.
[26] A. J. Appasamy, *Christianity as Bakti Marga: A Study of the Johannine Doctrine of Love* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1930), 45-47.
[27] A. J. Appasamy, *The Gospel and India's Heritage* (London: International Society for the Publication of Christian Knowledge, 1942), 206.

> amoeba, man. Before we can grasp the true significance of Jesus, we have to study Him in the context of the antecedent terms of creation.[28]

Chenchiah proposes a theological engagement in relation to cosmic entities, which introduces a cosmic Christology.

Paul D. Devanadan opines that the Good News of Jesus Christ holds social and cosmic dimensions. According to him, "At the threshold of this century, we talked of evangelism in terms of a Social Gospel. Though we erred in our understanding of its true nature, we have come to admit that God's redemptive work must radically affect human relations in society. Perhaps as we reach the middle of this century, we are coming to realise that the total sweep of the Good News envelopes God's entire creation. The ultimate end is a new heaven and a new earth, a new creation."[29] For Devanadan this new creation is a reality in the present, and its consummation is in the future.

Robin Boyd, who contributed immensely to the study of Indian Christian theology, calls for the church to be understood as the body of Christ, in the same way nature is revealed as the body of Christ. The whole creation is the body of Christ that reflects the perfect instrument of God's will.[30] This Christic – cosmic relationship is a theological foundation for a theology of nature, because the image of the body of the cosmic Christ can explain Indian contextual realities. Jyoti Sahi, an artist and an Ashram based ecologist introduces different images of Christ on the cosmic canvas. His paintings and writings reflect the body of cosmic Christ. He tries to connect the images of living and non-living entities in order to expose the attributes of Jesus Christ. It is his opinion that,

> we must understand more deeply the body of the Cosmic Christ, and this must in the future form the basis for our Asian Christology. It will be from this image of the body of the Cosmic Christ as the eucharist of the whole creation that we might discover a new Church more able to speak to the Asian reality.[31]

His urge for the articulation of the image of the Cosmic Christ necessitates the cultural meaning the concept of body.

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[28] Cited in M. M. Thomas, Toward an Indigenous Christian Theology in Gerald H. Anderson (ed) *Asian Voices in Christian Theology* (Maryknoll New York: Orbis Books, 1976), 30.
[29] Paul D. Devanadan, *Christian Concern in Hinduism* (Bangalore: CISRS, 1961), 119-120.
[30] Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1969), 143.
[31] Jyoti Sahi, 'Dance in the Wilderness' in Yeow Choo Lak (ed) *Theology and Cultures: Doing Theology with Asian Resources* (Singapore: ATESEA, 1995), 125.

Y. T. Vinayaraj, a prominent Dalit theologian, presents a contextual theology by re-loading the Dalit body as a discourse to explain theology of God/body.[32] By referring to the Hindu sacred story of the four fold social structure Vinayaraj affirms that the Dalit theology of God/body affirms the cosmic relationality of life and the sacramentality of the material. The issue of untouchability and pollution matter to the social body of sacrality, which conveys the "denied transcendence" of the "othered bodies." One of the aims of theologizing the "othered body" is to help the church and society to create a new approach, a new understanding of human nature, which recognizes the centrality of embodiment.

Arvind P. Nirmal, who was a profound Dalit theologian, delineates the othering tendencies toward earth, which offers a critical approach to framing a theology of nature. According to him, "The traditional theological paradigm has taught us to speak of God, the King and subsequently in forms of His transcendence, His sovereignty, His impassability, His power, His dominion and so on. Man too as God's vice regent, was conceived, of having dominion over the earth. He was to subjugate the earth and ravish, and exploit it, for his own selfish greed rather than his need."[33] Nirmal's analysis of Indian traditional theological engagements points out the "othered" cosmic body, which represents the voice of the victims of exploitation, both the marginalised communities and the exploited earth.

K. C. Abraham describes the "othered body" in connection with human approach to nature based on the mastering tendency of exploiting the resources of the nature. He calls the planet earth the "othered body" since nature lost its vitality due to technocratic centred human intelligentsia in mastering the earth. For him the othering process temporally constructs the image of body and witness to the era of ecological crisis. According to him,

> The era of body is the period of physical force. This gave rise to science and technology. A conquest of the earth followed with the exploitation of its resources to satisfy the unlimited human desire for consumption. The capability of human intelligence has risen to inexorable heights. But the contradictions of this are that earth has lost its vitality. The industrial paradigm of development belongs to this era. This has created a crisis.[34]

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[32] https://www.academia.edu/6974373/DALIT_BODY_WITHOUT_GOD_CHALLENGES_FOR_EPISTEMOLOGY_AND_THEOLOGY, viewed on 18/02/2018.

[33] Arvind P. Nirmal, 'Ecology, Ecumenics and Economics in Relation: A New Theological Paradigm' in Daniel D. Chetti (ed) *Ecology and Development* (Madras: Gurukul Publications, 1991), 21.

[34] K. C. Abraham, 'God is Green: A Third World Approach' in Mathew Koshy Punnakadu (ed) God is Green (Chennai: CSI), 30.

He holds this view by listening to the cries of the poor and seeing the wounds of the earth. He understands that the cry of the poor is for the life of all species and its living environment.[35] I would arguably put in this way that the "othered body" consists of the cry of the victims of environmental crisis, their place, life and hope. The ontological question of the "othered body" regarding the hope of the victims of environmental crisis must be heard in theologising the cosmic body of God the creator.

The cosmic dimension of "othered body" is a sacred property in which all living and non-living beings are stewarded by human beings. Sebastian Kappen views the cosmic dimension as a call to socialize the created world (nature and products of labour) with responsible ways to the integrity of creation.[36] Kappen looks for a responsible way ecologically to reflect the image of God the Creator on human faces. He clearly points out the theological expression of "othered body" is that;

> The divine challenge, the human response, and the something new which that response always creates, all these have a social significance. The divine challenge is mediated through a social situation, say, of exploitation or domination. Take, for instance, the oppression of landless labourers in a particular place. All who are sensitive to human values will see in it an unconditional, divine challenge to organise the affected labourers against the forces of oppression. The collective resistance that results is equally relative of God, insofar as it makes the divine No to evil operative in the here and now of history. Finally, if as a result of organised struggle there is greater equality and justice in that area, that too has a theological meaning.[37]

In the search for the theological meaning of the "othered body" the poor are understood not in relation to class terms. K. C. Abraham points out another level of search which invites theological discussions to re-read the exploited body of the poor ecologically. Considering the subalternity of the poor their social and cultural oppression is defined to seek a new world order and a new theology. According to him; "The poor are defined nor exclusively in class terms, although economic exploitation is still the striking reality of the people of the Third World. But the subaltern groups are subjected to other forms of social and cultural oppression, and they seek a new world order. The spiritual resources for building it should emerge

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[35] K. C. Abraham, 'God is Green: A Third World Approach', 33-31.
[36] Sebastian Kappen, 'Orientation for an Asian Theology' in Virginia Fabella (ed) *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1980), 112-114.
[37] Sebastian Kappen, 'Orientation for an Asian Theology', 112.

from their culture and spirituality. This has opened up new horizons of theology."[38] He finds that in the past Third World theologians had not paid proper attention to developing a theology of creation as important for the struggles of the poor. He views that a new awareness about the inter-connectedness between the renewal of the earth and struggle for justice has now set the stage to see the dynamic effect of God's liberation act.[39]

7.4. Re-imagining Liturgical and Sacramental as Theological Resources

The church is basically a caring community and is ecologically empowered by its liturgical experience. A liturgical approach to creation can provide a strong foundation in the formulation of an environmental theology. I have argued in the fourth chapter that worship liturgies are powerful instruments in creating an environmental consciousness and directing faith communities towards the protection of their living habitat. Liturgical celebration of life, which is affirmed in the church connects their life with rituals and practices. Religious rituals validate and intensify environmental relationships.[40] Rappaport is of the opinion that, "the sacred worship and rituals of human communities interact with the order of nature and the cosmos."[41] A liturgical approach to nature and the cosmos allows human attention to be sensitised with rituals and practices and all dimensions of human life.

A liturgical approach to nature reveals a wholistic mission paradigm of the church. It has radical thinking in seeing human commitment to nature as a sacred act. Viji Varghese Eappen asks,

> You may have a 'liturgy' in your Church, but how many of you know that the word 'liturgy' means 'work of the people'? If so, is it just what you do for two hours every week, the liturgy? Is it not what I do every second, uniting with this sacred world, the real liturgy? When I plough, when I till, when I sow, when I pluck the weeds, when I manure, when I water, when I harvest...for me, that is the liturgy.[42]

Seeing creation through the celebration of liturgical experience provides a new meaning in human approach to nature.

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[38] K. C. Abraham, 'The Third World Theology: Paradigm Shift' in M. P. Joseph (ed) *Confronting Life: Theology Out of the Context* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1995), 221.
[39] K. C. Abraham, 'The Third World Theology: Paradigm Shift', 218- 222.
[40] Roy A. Rappaport, *Ecology, Meaning and Religion* (Richmond, California: North Atlantic Books, 1979), 41.
[41] Northcott, The Environment and Christian Ethics, 1996, 169.
[42] Viji Varghese Eapen, 'Season of Creation' a sermon delivered on the Echo Hour Celebration Conducted by the Church of South India on 01/09/17 @ CSI EDEN Eco-Spirituality Centre, Othera, http://www.csisynod.com/deptnews_view.php?Id=5461&cat=EC

The CSI faith communities celebrate their life with nature with the following prayer, which pays special attention to creation. “O God, who created and sustains us with the goodness of food and water, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hid, by the inspiration of Your same Spirit, that brooded over the waters and created life out of chaos, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, that we may perfectly love You and Your creations and worthily magnify Your holy name in union with them; through Christ our Lord, AMEN.”[43] Nature is sensed during liturgical engagement as a sacred entity and creation is considered as co-worshipper. The new law instituted by Jesus Christ to love one another is being theologised by understanding the unity of creation that sends out worshippers to care for the poor and the nature.

The Christian faith assertion and confession of sin in liturgy directs us to see human error in seeing God’s creation and realise how we humans are hanging creation on the cross. Thus the liturgical celebration in Christian worship carries out the role of an environmental catechism. The CSI liturgy invites the worshippers to pray to God that, “you gave us enormous resources to sustain life of all creation, in the name of science and technology and advancement we pollute the air, the water and the land. Like how we crucified your Son Jesus Christ, we are crucifying your creation on the cross of our selfishness, thoughtlessness and greed.”[44] The Christian Endeavour Youth Fellowship of the SKD has brought out a special liturgy for the youth worship services to discern their commitment to nature by considering the present life style of technological society.

The liturgical celebration of faith communities influence and change the technological society into ecological consciousness with ethical implications.[45] Northcott evaluates the technologically guided life in connection with the decline of religion and the technological altering of the natural and the human environment. He calls for an urgent analysis of the links between technology led community life systems and the worship and everyday life of the parishes. It is suggested that

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[43] http://www.csisynod.com/Admin/resources/29_LITURGY%20ENVIRONMENT%20SUNDAY%202016.pdf, viewed on 19/12/2017.

[44] http://www.csisynod.com/Admin/resources/29_LITURGY%20ENVIRONMENT%20SUNDAY%202016.pdf, viewed on 19/12/2017.

[45] Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, 1996, 317-319.

ecological actions are required in order to create strong foundations for a theology of nature. With a deep sense of care for the environment Northcott suggests that,

> The enormous gulf between the liturgy and life of the Parish and the working world of many of its members is one which must be bridged within the church's own worship and community, through rituals, sermons, teaching and discussion materials and media which encourage church members to reflect on the ethical implications of their incorporation into technological process and global markets from the perspective of the creator/redeemer whose actions are for all the cosmos and not just for a diminishing group of Christians.[46]

Through liturgical engagements faith communities are inspired to value their environment as sacred, and learn that the environment is not only meant for human beings but also for all living and non-living beings.

The sacred valuation linked with cosmocentric and biocentric approaches to nature through liturgical celebration is empowered by the sacramental tradition of the church. Paul Puthanagadi analyses the Indian church's approach to liturgical engagement, and views liturgy as a celebration of life, which is manifested in God's creation. He believes,

> we need to bring in the hopes, fears, sufferings and aspirations of the people into our liturgy and we should proclaim the word in that context; then the liturgical proclamation of the Word will initiate a process of transformation into the society and the world which will ultimately result in the building up of the new earth and new heaven.[47]

His call for bringing the sufferings of victims/the body of victims into our liturgies reminds us to hold on to the hope of a new heaven and new earth through the memory of the sacramental broken body of the incarnate God.

Puthanagadi argues that the Eucharistic celebration produces a new community and new world order.[48] He holds that,

> the centre of the eucharistic celebration is the breaking of the bread by which the self-gift of Christ is made present to the community. The death of Christ is the greatest and most decisive act of liberation which God has affected through Christ in the world. It removes the root cause of all slavery and oppression, namely, human selfishness, which creates a world order of enslavement and exploitation and deforms the creation which God intended to be good.[49]

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[46] Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, 1996, 317-319.
[47] Paul Puthanangadi, 'Liturgy for the Creation of a New Earth and New Heaven' in Santhosh S. Kumar (ed) *Participating in God's Mission Today* 1(Thiruvalla: CSS, 2011), 110.
[48] Paul Puthanangadi, 'Liturgy for the Creation of a New Earth and New Heaven', 111.
[49] Paul Puthanangadi, 'Liturgy for the Creation of a New Earth and New Heaven,'111.

When the Eucharist is celebrated the bread which is made from our world is changed into the body of Christ. It distinguishes between ordinary bread and the sacredness of the elements of the nature – the communion bread. The difference is that the ordinary bread represents the consumerist act and the communion bread represents the incarnated sacred body's image of self-giving life. The communion bread re-images the broken body of the incarnated God and the cry of creation.[50] It forms a new community in memory of the brokenness of God in creation.

When Jesus Christ instituted the Eucharist as a symbol of the beginning of a new community, he asked that it should be performed in the remembrance of his continuous inspiration to be responsible communities for nurturing sustainable living. Jesus took the bread and blessed it, and gave thanks to God the Creator of the universe and recognised the goodness of God in it. Jesus introduced this act by manifesting it as a source of the new earth and new heaven, through which it was instituted as a sign of love to be shared for the ecological liberation of the planet earth and to take away all types of alienation from our communities. It offers the concern for one another among all participants of the commemoration of this act and provides fellow feeling. This pattern of liturgical sharing has ecological value in an Indian multi-religious context. Puthanangadi observes that, "our Holy Communion is not only a communion with the divinity, as in the case of *prasadam* in the worship of other religions. It is an act of communion among participants of worship by sharing the same bread."[51] *Prasadam* is a sacred food in India, which is served in Hindu temples by the priests to the worshippers. But the Eucharistic act of the church carries the virtues of God, which manifests the love of God toward all creations.

It is affirmed clearly by the congregation during the celebration of Holy Communion that Jesus Christ the slain lamb sustains wounded nature.[52] The slaughtered Christic-body identifies with the cosmos and redeems from all wounds and exploitations. In the words of Abraham, "The Eucharist and Baptism make use of elements of the earth. The bread broken is broken for the people and for the broken earth. God sustains the earth by God's broken body, the love that binds and nurtures. We celebrate this reality, entering ourselves into the reality in and through the suffering people and the suffering earth. God in solidarity with them is present

[50] Paul Puthanangadi, 'Liturgy for the Creation of a New Earth and New Heaven,' 112.
[51] Paul Puthanangadi, 'Liturgy for the Creation of a New Earth and New Heaven,'113.
[52] Order of Worship for the Eucharist, South Kerala Diocese (Thiruvananthapuram: SKD), 32.

with us."[53] The celebration of the broken body of Jesus Christ identifies with the brokenness of the victims and nature, and reveals the sacramentality of creation for its redemption. The celebration of the broken body of Jesus Christ invites the church to re-visit the sufferings of environmental victims, and to theologise suffering from below.

7.5. Suffering from Below: A Theological Category Toward Environmental Sustainability

Human experience has been a central part in finding sources for the formulation of theologies. The human experience of the world has been at the centre of theological discourses, which have been succinctly underlined by Karl Rahner.[54] Rahner describes the God experience in human life and the cosmic continuity. Grounded firmly on experiences, various communities articulate their theologies. For example in India, Dalit theology, Tribal/Adivasi theology and Feminist theology consider their experiences are a valuable source for formulating theologies. Such experiences are considered as a locus of the divine and a source for theology. Similarly, the experience of the marginalized, exploited communities and the poor have placed their relationship to the land, their struggles to overcome the different forms of oppression and their re-claiming of their culture, as a source for making theologies. A theological formulation begins from the realities of the ground of struggles which challenges traditional perspectives, and articulates a life centred theology "from below" and turns anthropological centred perspectives toward disentangling a perspective "from above."

The anthropological perspective fostered the notion that human beings have been entrusted to subdue the planet earth. This perspective of "from above" has a long history of theological exercise based on the thinking that God has entrusted human beings to subdue and have dominion over all forms of creation. This approach promotes the idea that all creations are made to serve human desires and needs, and consequently overlooks creation's own intrinsic value and balance. As a creative response to this approach Hill demonstrates a new idea based on a theology "from below." According to him, "a listening theology "from below" can teach us how to listen to the earth, to learn of its beauty, dignity, and needs. It can teach us

[53] K. C. Abraham, 'God is Green', 34.
[54] Karl Rahner, *The Spirit in the Church* (New York, Cross Road Publishing Co, 1959).

how to attend to the countless numbers who are deprived of the basic necessities because their environment is being destroyed. A liberating theology can teach us how to look "below" to the nature from which we arose and how to discover our links with the earth and all living things."[55] The perspective "from below" pervades in the life and ministry of the CSI churches in Kerala and indigenous traditions, as a sacred concept with two dimensions connected with their sufferings and ecological traditions.

7.5.1. Suffering from Below: A Theological Approach to Care for Nature and the Poor

The emergence of a theology of nature is grounded in the experience of the victims of environmental problems. The environmentally victimised people and their environment are simply being considered by the exploiters as mere objects. The victimised earth cries from its exploited state of life and sets forth her expectation demanding human consideration to treat the earth as a living subject. I have analysed the environmental voices of the victims in India in the sixth chapter by referring to the struggles of the poor and the cry of the earth. The cry of the poor and their response for a better environment is linked with justice. The recent environmental struggles in India provide substantial evidence that social justice and environmental justice are integral in explaining their hope for a better environment to live in.[56] As discussed in the last chapter, the justice concern of faith communities draws from the voices of the poor and their cry for a better environment, in order to formulate a theology of environmental sustainability.

Indian Christian theology treats the ecological crisis as a spiritual crisis. K.C. Abraham points out this argument by stating that,

> The relation between human and nature is based on a vision of God who created heaven and earth as an interdependent organism of unity. Any

[55] Brennan R. Hill, *Christian Faith and the Environment: Making Vital Connections* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 24.

[56] Environmental movements such as Narmada Bachao Andolan, a vibrant and active social movement in Indian which consists of consisting of adivasis, farmers, environmentalists and human rights activists protest against the number of large dams being built across the Narmada River, which flows through the states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Another environmental movement is Chipko Movement, which originated in Uttarakhand in 1973 against deforestation. In South India the Environment Support Group considerably fight against environmental injustice, and equips students, volunteers, farmers to stand for environmental justice.

> disruption in this fragile unity, mostly by human irresponsibility and avarice is a grievous problem and plunges our life into great peril.[57]

The unity between Human and all living and non-living beings is a mandatory ecological principle instituted by God, because after creating all the living and non-living beings on earth, God, said "it was good" (Gen. 1:25). God saw the earth as a dwelling place for all created beings, and entrusted human beings to care for each other and respect each other. The human beings, who were created as the crown of creation, must nurture the sacredness of the earth. Therefore the exploitation of the poor and the environment by the rich is against the life system of the earth. Jason defines the concept of the sacredness of the earth as a human commitment to care for the poor and nature, and drawing divine presence to the poor and the nature. According to him, "The concept of the sacredness of the earth emphasises the concept of earth as subject by setting apart and keeping them close to the divine."[58]

The groaning of the poor for their life is an ontological dimension which frames a theology for sustainable living by nurturing interconnected and interdependence between all living and non-living beings. Jason's ecological reading of Abel's cry by referring to it in a South Indian context is a hermeneutical approach to understanding environmental problems. By interpreting Genesis. 4: 1-12, Jason says that,

> Abel's blood cries out in agony striving for justice. Here applying the hermeneutics of identification and creative imagination we metaphorically imagine and identify earth with the suffering Abel and the human with greedy Cain. As Abel's blood took rights to question the injustice against him, the earth raises her voice looking forward for her right to survive as a subject.[59]

I found a similar justice consciousness among CSI communities who fought against injustice. The lamentation of the poor is considered to be the lamentation of nature, because the poor are the most affected of the victims of environmental injustice. The image of Abel's blood is seen in the struggles of the victims of the environmental crisis. The voice of the blood of Abel was raised up by the voice of the biotic community; his herd of sheep, grassy land and the forest. They had constituted biotic family, and the murder of Abel pointed to the absence of a carer who heard the cries

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[57] K. C. Abraham, 'Ecology: Some Theological Challenges' in Mathew Koshy Punnakkadu (ed) *Earth Sermons – 3* (Chennai: CSI, ISPCK, 2016), 173.
[58] Jason K, 'The silent Screaming of the Earth' in Mathew Koshy Punnakkadu (ed) *Earth Sermons – 3* (Chennai: CSI, ISPCK, 2016), 63.
[59] Jason K, 'The silent Screaming of the Earth', 65.

of the poor. Listening to the cries of the environmental victims and raising them up from all forms of exploitation to a sustainable living have become a theological commitment to care for God's creations.

The cry of environmental victims invites the attention of theological engagements to reimagine the sense of biotic sustainable living in the light of the cry of the earth for justice. Jason tries to metaphorically interpret Abel as the earth and Cain as human, and urges faith communities to hear the cry, agony and pain of the earth. His interpretation is;

> The greedy human beings illtreats the earth and stab it to death to make their life comfortable. The usage of agricultural land for the non-agricultural use mainly causes this issue. For industrial expansion the industrialists convert the agricultural land to the highly value generating industries. These industrial productions could generate more value than the productions produced by agriculture. Beside the fertility of the land will collapse and unfortunately no one has concern for the decaying earth. Even the farmers are demanding compensation as money rather than bothering about the injustice done to the earth by the capitalists. As the life of the earth has been taken away by the greedy human being the voice of the earth screams out to God seeking justice. The silent scream of the earth asking for human consideration of them as respectful subjects cannot be realised by the mute indifferent human beings.[60]

A theology of environmental sustainability emerges from the realisation that our earth is crying. As our faith tradition helps us to hear and respond to the cry of the poor we should discern the cry of the earth and commit ourselves to its life.[61] The present reality of the world is so alarming that we can listen to the groaning of the death of many species on this earth. All over the world we can hear the cry for clean water, air and soil.[62] God invites human attention to see how God broke his silence and cursed the ground and Cain. God and the earth broke their silence when human blood cried out from the land. Jason opines that, "The only way to rectify it and safeguard earth is turning our ears to the silent scream of the earth and responding to it with our responsible deeds to keep the earth's inhabitants as the subjects of living."[63] Making the land a sacred space for the purpose of life sharing of all living and non-living being is a responsible act to be initiated from human beings, who were created as the crown of creation. Recognition of our living habitat as a sacred

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[60] Jason K, 'The silent Screaming of the Earth', 66-67.
[61] K. C. Abraham, 'God is Green', 32.
[62] Prakash K. George, 'Sacramental Model of Life' in Mathew Koshy Punnakkadu (ed) *Earth Sermons – 3* (Chennai: CSI, ISPCK, 2016), 142.
[63] Jason K, 'The silent Screaming of the Earth',67.

space is necessary in order to listen to the cry of the poor, endangered species, the land all living and non-living entities, and to set up a home for earth communities.

The concept of home gardens in Kerala is a model in theologising a sacred place and as mentioned in Chapter 4, tree offering from home gardens among CSI communities is understood as a sacred metaphor. It offers a sense that care for the garden is inextricably connected with a human commitment to care for all the living and non-living beings in the garden as well as care for the poor.

7.5.2. Sustainable Living Realities "From Below"

Land is the subject of theological discourse that is understood and defined by communities who respect it and all the entities who dwell on it. D. Retnakara Sadananda, the CSI General Secretary defines the sacred by relating to land and the earth. According to him, "Sacred is the ground we stand on; holy is the land where we are planted; blessed is the earth within which we live and move and have our being."[64] This definition is tied up with the cultural and religious life of the subaltern communities who care for nature with the utmost commitment. For subaltern communities in India land is their ecology as they believe that their land is given by God. Nirmal Minz delineates clearly how they are connected with the land. According to him, "Land here means the land he (tribal community) lives on now, the trees, and plants he relates himself with day and night, and even the whole earth."[65] For them land is a foundation of life. They have a great reverence for the land and its resources. One of the tribals of Arunacha Pradesh believed that they came out of the rock. Even today, some of them still worship the rock, and they consider the land as extremely sacred.[66]

The subaltern Eco theology is built from the ecological consciousness rooted in Dalit and Tribal nature traditions. The Dalit ecological consciousness is built upon the understanding that land is to be respected and cared for. Sibasis Jana describes this ecological consciousness as, "Land and forest are open to the way of ecological balance and theological affirmation is done by worshipping nature. They are linking their life with nature and purifying their mind being aware of land, forest, air, water,

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[64] D. Retnakara Sadananda, Towards Understanding Our Green God, *CSI Life*, 13, 6, (2015), 4.
[65] Nirmal Minz, 'Primal Religious Perspective on Ecology' in Daniel D. Chetti (ed) *Ecology and Development: Theological Perspectives* (Madras: Gurukul, 1991), 50.
[66]Ashok Kumar, 'Spiritual Insights on Creation' in Mathew Koshy Punnakkadu (ed) *Earth Sermons – 3* (Chennai: CSI, ISPCK, 2016), 117.

sky….ecology is expressed in oral tradition, in the form of myths and legends which are rich in ecological insights."[67] This ecological "from below" tradition reveals a stewarding responsibility to protect the environment with a wholistic vision of life.

Dalit theology affirms that Dalits are the children of God, living on the land with pain and affliction in their attempts to preserve the land and the life system on it. Jana delineates the realm of ecological traditions of Dalit communities, which have been ignored by Indian Christian Eco theologians.[68] Contrary to such arguments Jana boldly reveals strong evidence that,

> Dalit theology is expressed in oral tradition, in the form of myths and legends which are rich in ecological insights. It develops a strong ecological network and thus refreshes the nature's vital force. Dalits are inseparably coupled with its close proximity to nature, especially to forests and land and with a harmonious relationship between them and their environment. Dalit theology is to reclaim this identity vis- a vis its relationship to a homeland and a friendly and rich environment.[69]

The most oppressed are most intimately connected with nature, and this is a naked reality in India. The Dalits are related to the land, the tribals to the forests and fisherfolk to the sea. They regard violence against nature as a violation of the rights of the biotic communities. They feel that they are related to nature, which is the body of God, and hence for them nature is sacred. Their holistic life system is understood from nature and is transmitted from one generation to the next as a sacred tradition. Their spirituality is grounded upon the wholistic vision of life which marks sustainable living of the indigenous communities.

The indigenous people have a holistic vision of life. The tribal tradition of India reveals the primal vision of life which is entwined with all living and non-living entities. The ontological identity of earth is rooted in the unity of humanity and nature. Nirmal Minz explains this oneness as a theological ground to promote sustainable living from generation to generation. In his words; "The life of tribal is based and built upon a vision of human existence in which they are aware that land, forest and the country they occupy are the gifts of Gods. They are not owners but custodians only….Therefore, man – nature, spirit continue as the basic feature of existence. It is this that makes us truly human. Balance and harmony of human –

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[67] Sibasis Jana, 'Bio-Diversity and Deep Commitment: A Deep-Ecological Study of Bengali Dalit Poetry' *Writers Editors Critics*, 7, 2, (2017), 96.
[68] George Mathew Nalunnakkal, *Green Liberation: Towards an Integral Ecothology* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1999).
[69] Sibasis Jana, 'Bio-Diversity and Deep Commitment: A Deep-Ecological Study of Bengali Dalit Poetry', 96.

nature – spirit is essential for us to remain human."[70] Indigenous peoples have resisted till today the modern capitalist onslaught on nature in the pursuit of profit. For them mother earth is sacred and they experience capitalist development as an onslaught on what is most precious and sacred.[71]

Johnson Vadakumcheri's close observation of tribal communities' territorial attachment provides new ideas for formulating a theology of environmental sustainability. He understands that they follow the ecological wisdom of their ancestors and keep a sustainable balance between their occupation and land. Their land has stories of care and substance. According to Vadakumcheri,

> For occupations and for daily sustenance, the tribals have to depend to a large extent on their local areas. Their attachment to particular territories grows because the land is part of the very personality of the individual. Individuals have identity due to their orientation to the land – the place of their ancestors, the myths and legends associated with the land, the labour and sustenance of generations all these are bringing about wonderful memories in the evolution of the tribal community.[72]

Ashok Kumar, with a broad ecological understanding explains clearly the Tribal ecological relationship with nature, maintaining that tribal culture and their world of nature are inextricably tied together. He expresses Wati Longchar's views on the tribal world of nature that; "The tribal world of nature can be explained only in terms of the world of nature; we cannot understand tribal culture adequately without understanding the world of nature, they are inseparably related. Once we divorce, we lose the meaning of life. For tribals, nature is not only a mechanical system, but it includes everything that is qualitative and spiritual."[73]

Ashok Kumar views tribal eco-spirituality as a theological category by referring to the ecological nature of Naga culture.[74] He writes about their eco-culture that,

> They lived in harmony with one another, understood one another, helped one another in times of need, spoke the same language and tried their best not to hurt one another. People lived in an intimate relationship with nature…Trees, bamboos, rocks, and rivers were believed to be the abode of spirits. Hence they do not destroy or kill intentionally, birds and animal were hunted

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[70] Nirmal Minz, Primal Religious Perspective on Ecology, in Daniel D. Chetti (ed) *Ecology and Development* (Madras: Gurukul Publications, 1991), 48.
[71] Bastiaan Wielenga, Ecology, Economy and Religions: Need for a Fundamental Reorientation, *Theology for Our Times*, 6, (1999), 33-34.
[72] Johnson Vadakumcheri, *Tribes and Cultural Ecology in Central India* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2003), 8.
[73] Ashok Kumar, 'Spiritual Insights on Creation' in Mathew Koshy Punnakkadu (ed) *Earth Sermons – 3* (Chennai: CSI, ISPCK, 2016), 117.
[74] Ashok Kumar, 'Spiritual Insights on Creation', 118.

> according to each season and people did not hunt during mating seasons and when the young ones were small.[75]

Studies reveal that environmental wisdom still exists in the minds of the villagers, who still love nature. Ashok Kumar points out that, "People love natural beauties, and the elders of the villages try their best to control the exploitation of forests, animals, birds, herbs, orchids, and other wild flowers."[76] B. E. Wilson reveals how the concept of the sacred is being understood and practiced ecologically among the villages in South India. He speaks; "The farmers go to their field every day and worship their land whether it is fertile or barren. They walk gently on the ground as they feel they are walking on the bosom of the mother earth. They never unnecessarily dig the ground. When they dig the ground they pour milk in the pit. Bhoomi puja is very important for the new construction. When Tamil people drink water they pour a few drops on the ground before drinking the rest. There is an intimate relationship with the farmer and the earth."[77] The living realities of these 'from below' traditions are understood ecologically as creative engagements to make their environment a better place to live in. The ecological traditions from below seek to quality environment; as such traditions are connected with land, soil, water, trees, animals.

7.6. Freedom to Quality Environment: A Theological Alternative for Environmental Sustainability

Theology is a reflection on the articulation of the faith experience of people in a given context.[78] The justice dimension of liberation of the poor has been well articulated in Indian Christian theology. Indian contextual theologies such as Dalit Theology and Tribal Theology articulate their theological reflections out of their struggle for existence in the midst of social and economic marginalisation. Such contextual theological reflections formulate visions for the future, and empower people to change the existing values and systems. The primary objective of theological reflection according to K. C. Abraham is to help people in their struggle

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[75] Ashok Kumar, 'Spiritual Insights on Creation,' 118.
[76] Ashok Kumar, 'Spiritual Insights on Creation,'118.
[77] B. E. Wilson, 'The Mother Earth Mourns' in Mathew Koshy Punnakkadu (ed) *Earth Sermons – 3* (Chennai: CSI, ISPCK, 2016), 137.
[78] K. C. Abraham, 'Third WORLD Theology: Paradigm Shift and Emerging concerns' in M. P. Joseph (ed) *Confronting Life: Theology Out of the Context* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1995). 202-224.

for justice and freedom.[79] But, the concept of freedom, which has been widely discussed in Indian theological discourse could be substituted by introducing "freedom to quality environment" as a new methodological shift in Indian Christian theology. From my discussions it is argued that the concept of freedom reflected in the discussions of Amartya Sen could play in a considerable role to define the freedom of the victims of environmental problems in order to formulate a theology of environmental sustainability.

Sibasis Jana holds the view that the ecological experience of the poor who are socially and economically oppressed can widen their theological and hermeneutical horizons by linking their social struggles with ecological concerns.[80] She argues methodologically that, ''the inequality in human society is closely related to inequality between humans and nature."[81] It is to be understood that creation is a realm where the inequality between humans and nature calls for reconciliation and a new life. Seven decades ago, in India Master CVV of Kumbakonam propagated the good news of the Gospel by explaining the power of the Creator God and God's salvation to all creation for a new quality of life. According to Kumbakonam, in creation God reveals himself and demonstrates his power, and in creation the release of divine power brings into being a new quality of life.[82] However, Indian Christian theological discourse has not taken into account the broken life of creation based on the issues of the victims of environmental problems.

The theology of environmental sustainability has to begin from the context of the victims of environmental problems. In general, it is considered that the publicness of theology and the social location of a theologian are to be considered in formulating theologies.[83] Therefore theology has a nature of public discourse. David Tracy considers three distinct and related social realities: the wider society, the academy and the church, in making Christian theology a relevant discourse. Methodologically, consideration of these three social realities as a theological perspective can uncover the faith centred everyday life of communities and relates revised interpretations of the tradition with issues of the day. Tracy argues that,

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[79] K. C. Abraham, 'Third WORLD Theology: Paradigm Shift and Emerging concerns', 207-208.
[80] Sibasis Jana, 'Bio-Diversity and Deep Commitment: A Deep-Ecological Study of Bengali Dalit Poetry', 91-96.
[81] Sibasis Jana, Bio-Diversity and Deep Commitment: A Deep-Ecological Study of Bengali Dalit Poetry, 91.
[82] Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1969), 146.
[83] K. C. Abraham, Theological Education for Public Discourse on Theology in India, http://cca.org.hk/home/ctc/ctc06-01/ctc06-01b.htm, viewed on 04/04/2018.

> each theologian must attempt to articulate and defend an explicit method of inquiry, and use that method to interpret the symbols and texts of our common life and of Christianity. More summarily stated, each theologian must take a stand on both the basic formal methodological and material constructive issues which faces us all.[84]

He makes this argument from the realization that Christian doctrines are formulated from experience and each doctrine has its own history of development and interpretation. It highlights the transformative dimension of theologies through a revisionist discourse. Since this pattern of theological engagement leads to the transformation of society, theological engagement can be considered as a public engagement to participate in the world and listen to its successes and failures, its cries for peace and justice and its celebration over successful accomplishments.[85] The public engagement of theology must be embedded with the social realities of the victims of environmental problems.

7.6.1. Freedom to Maintain and Sustain Justice for Quality Environment

Freedom to stand for justice and options for a quality environment is a major theme of Sen's views about environmental sustainability. Sen believes that society is an organization. Church, being a spiritual as well as a faith community, can play a significant role in making moral and political ground for justice for the quality of the environment. Margaret Goodall and John Reader explicitly say that the church' as a community, can act as a bridge maker, providing a common platform to work for the healing of the environment. According to them,

> The community of the church could be seen as a bridge between the private world of self and home and the public world, where individuals might experience a shared common space and learn what inter-dependence means in practice, allowing the space for the healing of both inner and outer worlds. Inter-dependence is a concept which has come to the centre of the environmental debate as a way of describing our relationship with the rest of the natural order.[86]

In order to keep this role fruitfully, Goodall and Reader see interdependence as a justice concern. Their justice concerns aim at a deeper level of inter-dependence for

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[84] David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), 3.
[85] Brennan R. Hill, *Christian Faith and the Environment: Making Vital Connections* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 32.
[86] Margaret Goodall and John Reader, 'Creating Space', in Ian Ball, Margaret Goodall, Clare Palmer and John Reader (eds) *The Earth Beneath: A Critical Guide to Green Theology* (London: SPCK, 1992), 139.

all living and non-living being in a sustainable way. Brennan R. Hill also opines that "ecological concerns are often issues of justice, both toward the earth itself and toward the many people who are forced to live in unhealthy and undesirable conditions."[87]

Amartya Sen in his challenging book, "The Idea of Justice," tries to present a choice approach by presupposing society as an organisation. He demonstrates the theory of choice in pursuit of justice in all sorts of life by grounding his book on his previous work regarding welfare economics, for which he was awarded a Nobel Prize in 1998. Thus he conjoins his capability theory with choice theory. Differing from Rawls' Theory of Justice, Sen attempts to bring in "what we should care about", which was not included in Rawls' theory. The advancement of Justice and the removal of injustice are demanded for the relevance of freedom and capabilities. In an age of rapid technological advancement, industrial growth, the environment and the poor are to be cared for in our choice of a just society. Here Sen's voice and ideas regarding the preservation and enhancement of the quality of the environment and human life become relevant in formulating a theology of environmental sustainability. Along with Jean Dreze, Sen provides evidence to show how the environment and the life of the poor are connected in enhancing the quality of the environment. Both argue that,

> since we value the freedom to lead a pollution-free life, the preservation of a pollution-free atmosphere must be an important part of the objectives of development. Especially for poorer people, who tend to spend a much higher proportion of their daily lives in the open – sometimes even sleeping on the streets – the quality of air is a critically important influence on the level of deprivation of their lives.[88]

Increasing and sustaining the quality of the environment is directly linked with justice for the poor and the environment.

I maintain that Amartya Sen's capability approach can be discussed as an environmental justice principle in India. Sen firmly argues that we must concentrate on increasing human capabilities in order to preserve and enrich the environment. For him, capabilities are freedoms that people have to achieve the lifestyle that they have reason to value. His capability approach focuses on human life, and proposes a serious departure from concentrating on the means of living to the actual

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[87] Brennan R. Hill, *Christian Faith and the Environment: Making Vital Connections*, 22.
[88] Jean Dreze & Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory India and its Contradictions* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), 43.

opportunities of living. The capability approach can be used as a theory of social justice seeking to reduce social exclusion and inequalities and to enhance environmental justice. The notion of capability is essentially one of freedom – the range of options a person has in deciding what kind of a life to lead"[89] From this perspective I would argue that living without an opportunity to enhance capability in different circumstances of life, creation will become unsustainable. A sustainable living situation must be offered and ensured to the poor and the victims of environmental crisis. In a situation where social discrimination is critical, social discrimination is assessed on the basis of hazard location. In a situation where the political condition is culturally and religiously manipulated, political and ethical response to all living and non-living beings must not be muted. Above all, the religious aspect of care for nature must be motivated.

7.6.2. Quality Environment: A Sacred Manifestation of Environmental Sustainability

In formulating a theology for environmental sustainability the church plays a prominent role, because churches represent local communities of place. The publicness of Christian theology has a pragmatic role within political agencies of states. Northcott reminds us of the crucial pragmatic role of the local communities in the quest for environmental action. In his words,

> the failure of the state to protect citizens, or nature, from the related crisis of climate change and loss of biodiversity produces a growing clamour among activists and academics for the kinds of environmental action that take back responsibility for environmental protection from the State into the hands of citizens and local communities of place.[90]

Therefore, church could be a place to uphold human responsibility to care for nature by representing bioregional place, and a sacred place to assure a quality life. Drawing from early Indian Christian theologians Jyoti Sahi defines church as a new creation of to transform all creations.[91] In his definition he brings in the metaphor of the body of God by relating it to the human body and nature. He opines that'

> The Church is the "New Creation" and is not just the human community, but the whole of nature transformed. The visible church is the manifestation of this

[89] Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, *India Economic Development and Social Opportunity* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), 10-11.
[90] Northcott, *Place, Ecology and the Sacred: The Moral Geography of Sustainable Communities*, 2015, 147.
[91] Jyoti Sahi, 'Dance in the Wilderness' in Yeow Choo Lak (ed) *Theology and Cultures: Doing Theology with Asian Resources* (Singapore: ATESEA, 1995).

> symbol of the "New Creation'', in which not only human beings, but the whole cosmos is contained. In that sense the church is the microcosm, in the same way that we understand the body of God is not only a human body, but the whole of creation. The visible church has a task to relate the human with the rest of creation; it is a sacred place in which the human community realizes its identity with the whole creation.[92]

Sahi demonstrates church as an image of God's new creation to offer quality life, and as the earth home of all living and non-living beings. It is possible when the visible church makes sacred places to be homes for earth communities.

The preservation and enhancement of the quality of life for all creation can be framed in Indian Christian theology as an attempt to envision environmental sustainability. Sustainability is a shared vision.[93] In sharing the vision of sustainable living, Christian environmental theological engagements can identify the earth as a home for all living and non-living beings. Even in his pastoral ministry, K. C. Abraham underlines the image of the earth as a home, because he believes that the publicness of theological affirmation has a value upon different faith communities. He brings his personal testimony when dedicating new houses, saying that,

> I have consciously tried to make people aware of the fact that the home we bless is part of the "home" that God creates and preserves the earth. It is also God's house, the temple of God. The temple is for worship and for nurturing of love, justice and peace that are necessary to maintain the great home, the earth.[94]

Everything which exists in the earth home is for nurturing life and is for all. This is the ontological expression of a theology toward sustainability. In the sacred context of faith communities, Samuel Rayan says, "Creation is God's family born of his heart, and loved by her into existence, and nurtured daily with endless caring. Of this cosmic family of God we are (to be) response-able members."[95] Images embedded in the rituals, practices, sacraments and sacred places are theological resources, from which the ecological vision emerges that the church is a manifestation of the cosmic home of God. Therefore, a sacred approach to nature nurtures faith communities to heal our lands and our communities.[96] Regarding creation as sacred offers a transformative vision which will keep the environmental sustainability mission alive for both today and tomorrow. This perspective points to a new religious

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[92] Jyoti Sahi, 'Dance in the Wilderness' in Yeow Choo Lak', 122.
[93] Jeremy L. Caradonna, *Sustainability: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). 234-236.
[94] K. C. Abraham, 'God is Green', 33.
[95] Samuel Rayan, *Theological Perspective on the Environmental Crisis*, 1994, 228.
[96] Northcott, *A Political Theology of Climate Change*, 2014.

approach, which invites human communities to maintain a robust relationship with nature and strive for sustainable living realities. As Lynn White reminds us, when we find a new religion we will be able to address the environmental crisis and build up a new human nature relationship.[97] The task and challenge of the new religion is to represent a Christian cosmology of creation and share the struggle in bringing forth the new earth.

7.7. Conclusion

A theology which encompasses the concerns of environmental sustainability explains creation doctrines from the understanding of nature as the body of the Creator God. It explains from the experience of environmental victims and from different communities who contribute to the religious dimension of sustainability such as indigenous communities. The understanding, that nature is the body of God, emerges from the understanding that nature is sacred and that creation manifests the image of the Creator God who creates and sustains. For faith communities, in their worship, creation is a sacred subject, which is strongly affirmed within rituals, liturgies and sacraments. It reminds Christian communities to glorify God by caring for and valuing all the living and the non-living beings of God's creation. Caring for and valuing creation creates a new cosmic spirituality in which human beings can recognise and revere God's presence in every creature, and thereby implement the creation-community, and find a new sustainable harmony.[98] Nature, which bears the body of God is incarnated in the human body and represents the brokenness of all living and non-living beings. The struggles and sufferings of the poor and the victims of environmental problems represent the "othered body." This "othered body" is an ontological ground and theological foundation to explain the "Christic-cosmic body." This Christic-Cosmic centred theology is revealed in an environmentalism "from below," which demands freedom of the poor and the victims of environmental problems. In this way a theology of environmental sustainability speaks about cosmology and the environmental sufferings "from below," and embraces the sustainable living realities of communities whose life and ecological behaviour are integrally connected with the preservation of the earth. Therefore Christian

[97] Lynn White Jr., 'The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis', 1205-206.
[98] Jurgen Moltmann, 'God's Covenant and Our Responsibility', in R. J. Berry (ed) *The Care of Creation: Focusing Concern and Creation* (Leicester: Inter-varsity Press, 2000), 110.

environmental theology emerges as a response of faith communities to bear witness to the Creator God who is present in the sacred cosmos and to affirm quality environment as a sacred manifestation of environmental sustainability.

Conclusion

The Indian Christian approach to environmentalism offers a potential role in maintaining and sustaining ecological behaviour. The environmental views emerging from the CSI Christians in Kerala is that nature is sacred and preserving it with environmentally sound living results in sustainability. Seeing nature to be sacred has a long historical tradition, which resonates with the ecological behaviour of the pre-Christian nature tradition. Contemporary Hindu views regarding the sacred nature of the environment is used in India for political purposes, and whatever is emerging to be the sacred approach to nature is not strong enough to claim that contemporary Hindu religious environmentalism is "environmentally friendly." Though the proponents of Indian religious environmentalism claim that a religious approach to nature draws ecological views from Indian religions, none of them have given sufficient heed to an environmentalism "from below," which consists of the ecological world of the indigenous communities and the cries of the victims of environmental issues.

The environmental engagement of the CSI churches in Kerala and in the Pravimala tribal colony reveal that Christian belief, nurtured in the sacred traditions of Kerala, presents a different ecological religious perspective which argues that the concepts of the sacred and sustainability are well connected with the indigenous ecological behaviour of Keralan Christians. The Keralan Christian ecological consciousness is rooted in indigenous traditions and the sacredness attached to the life of all living and non-living beings. CSI Christians in Kerala have been propagating environmental values and concerns as part of manifesting Christian commitment to care for nature. Religious environmentalism often fosters various prospects that help faith communities to understand their living habitats and maintain their local environment qualitatively. Religious rituals, practices, festivals, worship and sacraments of faith communities are closely interwoven with their environment. Indian Christian theological tradition from its early stages has pragmatically followed eco-friendly life especially in the villages. All of them are connected with culture, rituals, sacraments and festivals. The practice of maintaining sacred groves and

home gardens has creatively contributed to keeping a green ecological consciousness and upholding theological positions.

The ecological landscape of the CSI Christians in Kerala and the Kani tribal communities offer a new definition to the concepts of the sacred and sustainability, which is integrally connected with faith centred environmental behaviour and activism. It is understood that the concept of sustainability and the sacred, maintain the long faith tradition of ecological behaviour through various rituals, practices, liturgies and sacraments, and formulate the basis of an environmental activism to repair the nature-human relationship. The Christian environmental activism moves beyond the personal level of the members of the faith communities through ecclesial level and it moves to wider social and environmental locations. The sacred approach to nature is a religious perspectival method which sees the spirit of God in creation. In the quest towards an environmentally sound way of living, this perspective maintains ecological behaviour, preserves nature and sustains the resources of nature by demanding ecological justice and freedom for the victims of the environmental crisis

This study reveals that the concept of sustainability and the sacred points to relevant theological resources, which are linked with the ecological behaviour of the sacred nature tradition and environmental sufferings “from below.” Environmentalism ‘from below’ brings a pertinent theological question based on the preference for their survival, and this environmental discourse is revealed in two ways. First of all, it emerges ‘from below’ considering the environmental victims encounter with powers from above that appear in the form of marginalising their life and separating them from their environmental locations. Secondly, it points out that land is considered as sacred, and a theological ground is constructed from the discourse linked with the land by respecting and caring for it and all the entities that dwell on it. The second mode of environmentalism draws ecological practices from indigenous traditions which consider nature to be sacred in order to frame a theological ground in order to promote sustainable living. Environmental behaviour ‘from below’ proposes an alternative to the modern onslaught on nature, by transmitting a spirituality which will elevate the concept of sacred in the stewardship of creation.

The concept that nature is sacred is metaphorically propagated among CSI Christians by portraying nature as the body of God. The brokenness of the body of Jesus Christ represents the marginalised body of the poor and of wounded nature.

The body of Jesus Christ identifies with the cosmic body which reflects the image of God in creation and in the life of the victims of the environment. The Eucharistic involvement of CSI faith communities in Kerala defines the “othered body” in the context of the mission of the churches’ commitment to the preservation of our earth home. The Eucharistic experience is visualised in the environmental consciousness and in the crofts of the faith communities with a realisation that the unprotected nature of the resources of nature are the things of God and the unprotected poor are the people of God.

The struggle for justice and freedom to choose a quality environment is a conceptual theme which emerges from the environmental movements of the CSI churches in Kerala. Environmental sustainability is understood as the right of the poor as they choose the freedom to live in a quality environment. The concept of the sacred is connected with the theological affirmation of the sufferings of people and the suffering of the earth which offers a theological perspective to create responsible communities for nurturing sustainable living. The sacred approach to nature emerges as a new religious perspective demanding a healthy environment and defines it to be the sacred manifestation of the sustainable living of all living and non-living beings.

Appendix I

Research Questions

Malabar Diocese

1. What is your understanding of environmental problems?
2. What are the environmental problems you are facing today in your area?
3. How do you religiously approach your local environmental problems?
4. What are the main concerns of your congregation in addressing environmental problems?
5. What kind of environmental initiatives your church has been carrying out?
6. How does your church reveal environmental concerns during worship?
7. What are the special emphasises that your church gives to the church attenders in propagating ecological teachings?
8. Do you receive any ideas which uphold the view that nature is sacred?
9. Do you consider nature as sacred?
10. How does your church propagate environmental values in the neighbourhood?
11. In what way your church sees environmental pragmatism?
12. How do you understand the relationship between environmental problems and the problems of the poor in your community?
13. How does the poor communities in your church and society approach environmental problems locally?
14. Could you please explain how does your church connects justice with environmentalism?
15. How does the educational institutions in your diocese locally deal with environmental problems? What are the main environmental programmes your institution is carrying out?
16. What is the response of students from other religious background in participating environmental activities?
17. How do you understand environmental sustainability?
18. How does your church theologically and pragmatically teach environmental sustainability?
19. What are the main activities your church is carrying out to offer environmental sustainability to the church and society?

20. What is the role of your church in pragmatically explaining about environmental sustainability in a secular context?

East Kerala Diocese

1 What is your understanding of environmental problems?
2 What are the environmental problems you are facing today in your area?
3 How do you religiously approach your local environmental problems?
4 What are the main concerns of your congregation in addressing environmental problems?
5 What kind of environmental initiatives your church has been carrying out?
6 How does your church reveal environmental concerns during worship?
7 What are the special emphasises that your church gives to the church attenders in propagating ecological teachings?
8 Do you receive any ideas which uphold the view that nature is sacred?
9 How does your church propagate environmental values in the neighbourhood?
10 In what way your church sees environmental pragmatism?
11 How do you understand the relationship between environmental problems and the problems of the poor in your community?
12 How does the poor communities in your church and society approach environmental problems locally?
13 How does you and your church approach Kasturirangan Report? Do you think that this report will displace the poor from their local living habitat?
14 On what ground you raise voice against Kasturirangan Report? Is your voice grounded upon justice concerns?
15 What is your suggestion to overcome the fear and anxiety of the poor who feel that they are the most affected of Kasturirangan Report?
16 Could you please explain how does your church connects justice with environmentalism?
17 How does the educational institutions in your diocese locally deal with environmental problems? What are the main environmental programmes your institution is carrying out?
18 How do you understand environmental sustainability?
19 How does your church theologically and pragmatically teach environmental sustainability?

20 What are the main activities your church is carrying out to offer environmental sustainability to the church and society?

Kollam Kottarakara Diocese

1. What is your understanding of environmental problems?
2. What are the environmental problems you are facing today in your area?
3. How do you religiously approach your local environmental problems?
4. What are the main concerns of your congregation in addressing environmental problems?
5. What kind of environmental initiatives your church has been carrying out?
6. How does your church reveal environmental concerns during worship?
7. What are the special emphasises that your church gives to the church attenders in propagating ecological teachings?
8. Do you receive any ideas which uphold the view that nature is sacred?
9. How does your church propagate environmental values in the neighbourhood?
10. In what way your church sees environmental pragmatism?
11. How do you understand the relationship between environmental problems and the problems of the poor in your community?
12. How does the poor communities in your church and society approach environmental problems locally?
13. How does you and your church approach the environmental issues related to the English India Clays Limited?
14. What is the main concern you put forward to be for/against this clay company? Is your voice grounded upon justice concerns?
15. Do you feel that you are unprotected environmentally and socially?
16. What is your suggestion to overcome the fear and anxiety of the poor who feel that they are the most affected of the issues linked with this clay company?
17. Could you please explain how does your church connects justice with environmentalism?
18. How does the educational institutions in your diocese locally deal with environmental problems? What are the main environmental programmes your institution is carrying out?
19. How do you understand environmental sustainability?

20. How does your church theologically and pragmatically teach environmental sustainability?
21. What are the main activities your church is carrying out to offer environmental sustainability to the church and society?

South Kerala Diocese

1. What is your understanding of environmental problems?
2. What are the environmental problems you are facing today in your area?
3. How do you religiously approach your local environmental problems?
4. What are the main concerns of your congregation in addressing environmental problems?
5. What kind of environmental initiatives your church has been carrying out?
6. How does your church reveal environmental concerns during worship?
7. What are the special emphasises that your church gives to the church attenders in propagating ecological teachings?
8. Do you receive any ideas which uphold the view that nature is sacred?
9. Do you practice any ritual which maintain and promote ecological consciousness? Could you please explain briefly about its religious significance?
10. How do you understand the relationship between environmental problems and the problems of the poor in your community?
11. How does the poor communities in your church and society approach environmental problems locally?
12. How does you and your church approach the environmental issues related to the Vilappilsala Waste Decomposing Plant?
13. What is the role of your church in equipping people to move against the Vilappilsala Waste Decomposing Plant?
14. On what ground your agitation against the Vilappilsala Waste Decomposing plant emerged?
15. Do you believe that the Vilappilsala Waste Decomposing Plant created environmental injustice in your living habitat?
16. How do you evaluate your movement's journey toward achieving a win against environmental injustice?
17. Could you please explain how does your church connects justice with environmentalism?

18. How do you understand environmental sustainability?
19. How does your church theologically and pragmatically teach environmental sustainability?
20. What are the main activities your church is carrying out to offer environmental sustainability to the church and society?

Kani Tribal Colony in Puravimala, Thiruvananthapuram

1. What is your understanding of environmental problems?
2. What are the environmental problems you are facing today in your area?
3. How do you religiously approach your local environmental problems?
4. Do you receive any ideas which uphold the view that nature is sacred?
5. Would you please give some examples which could validate your understanding that nature is sacred?
6. Do you practice any ritual which maintain and promote ecological consciousness? Could you please explain briefly about its religious significance?
7. How did/do you follow shifting cultivation for a sustainable relationship with nature? What was/is a social and ecological significance of this practice?
8. How do you understand the contrast between hunter gathering and killing animals?
9. How do you protect your habitat by practicing traditional wisdom?
10. Do you consider your traditional knowledge as sacred knowledge?
11. What is your traditional understanding of sustainability?
12. What are the religious rituals and practices that you follow to promote and maintain sustainability?
13. Would you please explain how these religious rituals help enable to share resource of the nature on an equitable way?
14. Do you currently face any troubles from modernization?
15. What are the issues you are facing today from government agencies that affect you in maintaining environmental sustainability?

Appendix. II

My interviewees from Malabar Diocese

1. Reverend Saju Benjamin
2. Reverend Vinod Allen
3. Reverend T. I. James
4. Mr. Lambart Kishore
5. Dr. Sachin P. Johns
6. Mrs. May Galdys Pavamany
7. Mr. Pramod
8. Mr. Koshy George

My interviewees from East Kerala Diocese

1. Mr. Saji Thadathil
2. Mrs. Sicily Johnson
3. Mr. P. G. George
4. Reverend Jaison Joseph
5. Reverend Lijo Abraham
6. Reverend Sibi Stephen
7. Jose Peter

My interviewees in Kollam Kottarakara Diocese

1. Mr. Varkey Jacob
2. Mr. Cherian
3. Mr. Sajan
4. Mr. Sunilraj
5. Sister Christeena
6. Mr. Titus Harris
7. Reverend Moses David

My interviewees in South Kerala Diocese

1. Mr. Justin Manohar Raj
2. Mr. K. P. John

3. Mr. Subash
4. Mr. Sabu/Sajith
5. Mr. Selvaraj
6. Mr. Gnanadhas
7. Dr. Christabel P. J
8. Rt. Rev. Dr. J. W. Gladstone
9. Reverend Jyoti Isaac
10. Reverend Dr. Jayaraj Saji
11. Dr. Braivin Camly

My interviewees in Kani tribal colony, Puravimala

1. Mr. Parappan
2. Mr. Babu
3. Mr. Soman
4. Mr. Thankappan
5. Mr. Rajendran
6. Mrs. Jisha
7. Mrs. Sarasu

Appendix III

Participant Consent Form I used during fieldwork

Consent Form
for participation and personal data to be used for research

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the research project, the details of which are:

Research Project name:	PhD Research – Sacred and Sustainability
Name of researcher:	Paul Singh Job Retnaselvam
Researcher's Contact details:	+44743501719 paulsinghjr@gmail.com
Scope of the project:	Through this research I intend to address the question of how the sacred approach to nature inspires people to act in an environmentally conscious way. I investigate the relationship between sacred and sustainability in the context of the environmental discourses in India. This research is carried out for the fulfilment of the PhD programme offered by the School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh. The researcher and the Supervisor will have access to raw data, and data will be kept until the completion of the research programme. It may appear later in an academic journal or book.
Confidentiality and Anonymity *(The researcher will indicate how confidentiality and anonymity will be preserved)*	All data will be used honestly and will be kept confidentially for the successful completion of the research project. All data will not be shared with other research students or parties. I assure that I will keep my integrity in using data confidentially and truthfully.

Please complete the following:

I consent to participating in this research project and understand that I may withdraw at any time. YES □ NO □

I consent to my personal data, as outlined below, being held for use in the research project detailed above YES □ NO □

Researcher to specify personal data to be used for research

Signature:	
Date:	

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